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**Allegory and Modernity in English Literature**  
***c. 1575-1675***

**by**

**Vladimir Brljak**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English and Comparative Literary Studies

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As for more personal debts, they are too extensive, and too personal, to be acknowledged here, but be it said that nobody has invested more in me than my parents, Bosiljka and Josip Brljak.

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work, that is has not been submitted for a degree at any other university, and that its contents do not form part of any other dissertation or thesis.

## SUMMARY

The thesis examines the place of allegory in the literature and intellectual culture of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, especially in its complex and contested relationship to the notion of the period's (early) modernity. What is modernity's quarrel with allegory? Why does it run so deep in Western thought, and why has it remained with us to the present day? What specific forms does this quarrel assume in the literary culture of the period now commonly designated as "early modern"? Why has allegory, under its many names, remained a point of differentiation and dispute between various sets of ancients and moderns even into our – some would say "postmodern" – times? Even as scholarship on allegory grows increasingly comprehensive and sophisticated, commentary on these issues has remained sporadic and inconclusive, and the thesis seeks to provide a more focused and comprehensive examination of the subject than has thus far been available.

In terms of its format, the thesis pursues with these concerns through three chapters – on "Allegory and Poetics", "Allegory and Drama", and "Allegory and Epic" – preceded by an Introduction on "Allegory and Modernity", and followed by an Afterword on "(Neo)allegory and (Anti)modernity". The Introduction and Afterword discuss the broader questions raised by the allegory-modernity problem, and thus constitute a polemical frame for the three "case studies" on poetics, drama, and epic, which engage particular sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts and traditions. These range from such canonical staples as Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, or Milton's *Paradise Lost* to numerous other, less well known, but no less important works.

In reconsidering the place of allegory in this corpus, the thesis is primarily intended as a contribution to English literary and intellectual history. On a broader level, it is also intended as a contribution to the more comprehensive project of "allegory studies": the emergent nexus of interdisciplinary scholarship tackling those comprehensive and fundamental issues raised by the phenomenon of allegory which transcend particular discipline-, period-, or author-focused contexts. The thesis thus hopes to demonstrate the signal importance of the allegory-modernity problem in any advanced understanding of the Western allegorical tradition, at the same time as it sheds new light on what is in many ways the most important and most contested period – apart from our own, perhaps – in the history of this tradition.



## CONVENTIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The citation format adopted in this thesis combines essential references in the footnotes with full entries in the Bibliography. Specifically, the references in the footnotes abbreviate titles, initialize first names, and omit translators and collaborators (except where required for identifying the work in the Bibliography), printers and publishers, and number of volumes for multi-volume works.

The following abbreviations are employed:

<i>CQ</i>	<i>The Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CW</i>	<i>The Works of John Milton</i> . Gen. ed. Frank Allen Patterson. 18 vols with index. New York: Columbia UP, 1931-1938. [Columbia Works]
EETS	Early English Text Society
<i>ELN</i>	<i>English Language Notes</i>
<i>ELR</i>	<i>English Literary Renaissance</i>
<i>FR</i>	<i>The Fortnightly Review</i>
<i>GM</i>	<i>The Gentleman's Magazine</i>
<i>HLQ</i>	<i>Huntington Library Quarterly</i>
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>JHI</i>	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
<i>JMEMS</i>	<i>The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies</i>
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Modern Philology</i>
<i>MQ</i>	<i>Milton Quarterly</i>
<i>MS</i>	<i>Milton Studies</i>
<i>N&amp;Q</i>	<i>Notes and Queries</i>
<i>ODBN</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>OW</i>	<i>The Complete Works of John Milton</i> . Gen. ed. Thomas Corns and Gordon Campbell. 11 vols. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008—. [Oxford Works]
<i>PQ</i>	<i>Philological Quarterly</i>
<i>REED</i>	<i>Records of Early English Drama</i>
<i>RES</i>	<i>The Review of English Studies</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studies in Philology</i>
<i>SQ</i>	<i>Shakespeare Quarterly</i>
<i>SS</i>	<i>Shakespeare Survey</i>
<i>UTQ</i>	<i>University of Toronto Quarterly</i>
<i>YP</i>	<i>Complete Prose Works of John Milton</i> . Gen. ed. Don M. Wolfe. 8 vols. New Haven: Yale UP, 1953-82. [Yale Prose]

# **INTRODUCTION**

## **ALLEGORY AND MODERNITY**

I do not know with any certainty which of the two eminent parties to this dispute is right; I know that allegorical art seemed enchanting at one time (the labyrinthine *Roman de la Rose*, which lives on in two hundred manuscripts, consists of twenty-four thousand lines) and is now intolerable. And not only intolerable; we also feel it to be stupid and frivolous. Neither Dante, who represented the history of his passion in the *Vita nuova*, nor Boethius, the Roman, writing his *De consolazione* in the tower of Pavia under the shadow of the executioner's sword, would have understood this feeling. How can this discord be explained without recourse to the *petitio principii* that tastes change?  
– J. L. Borges, 1949<sup>1</sup>

## I

The ensuing pages seek to revisit the question posed by Borges, the question to which there is still, more than sixty years later, no definite or even widely accepted answer. What is modernity's quarrel with allegory? Why does it run so deep in Western thought, and why has it remained with us to the present day? Already for Plato, before the word *allegory* was even invented, it was "the ancients" who "used poetical forms which concealed from the majority of men their real meaning", while "In more modern times, [...] men [...] plainly demonstrate their meaning so that even shoemakers may hear and assimilate their wisdom".<sup>2</sup> Yet long after Plato himself became an ancient, similar claims continued to be made, and allegory, under its many names, has remained a point of differentiation and dispute between various sets of ancients and moderns even into our – some would say postmodern – times. Why is this so? Obviously, tastes change, but why do they change?

More specifically, what particular configurations does the allegory-modernity nexus assume in the literature and intellectual culture of the period traditionally designated as

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<sup>1</sup> J. L. Borges, "From Allegories to Novels" [1949], in *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. E. Weinberger (New York, 2000), 338.

<sup>2</sup> *Theaetetus*, 180c-d, in *Complete Works*, ed. J. M. Cooper (Indianapolis, 1997); unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Plato are from this edition.

“Renaissance”, and more recently, “early modern”? Minor idiosyncrasies notwithstanding, Borges’ notion of the decline of allegory – of an epochal turn in Western aesthetics “from allegories to novels”, imagined as roughly coextensive with the passage from the so-called Middle Ages to the Renaissance or early modern period, and itself symptomatic of the period’s more fundamental, metaphysical breakthrough “from species to individual, from realism to nominalism”<sup>3</sup> – is exemplary of the most influential and widely disseminated of such configurations. According to this view, the emergence and development of which is further discussed below, allegory rises to prominence in the decadent twilight of classical antiquity, thrives during the Middle Ages, and is cast away as the European mind reclaims its classical heritage, emerging, at long last, into that modernity which we still, irreversibly, inhabit.

To ask Borges’ question today is, however, to ask it in the light of an extensive and ever-increasing store of evidence of the inadequacy of this traditional view, and the essential continuity of the allegorical tradition from classical antiquity to at least the eighteenth century. In 1949, this evidence was still largely restricted to specialist studies unlikely to find their way into the hands of a general reader, even one as omnivorous as Borges, and the decline-of-allegory narrative reigned supreme. Yet to dispense with this narrative, as numerous scholars have now done, in no way absolves us from posing the question of allegory’s relationship to modernity; on the contrary, it demands that the question be posed in a more nuanced and insightful manner. Indeed, Borges’ question now itself becomes an object of metahistorical inquiry, and instead of asking why allegory thrived in the Middle Ages and then declined in the Renaissance, we need to ask why so many people were convinced that this was how it happened, and why they remained convinced for so long, and in the face of such abundant evidence to the contrary.

Here emerge the two principal aims of this study. The first and primary aim is to contribute to our understanding of the allegorical tradition in the English literature and intellectual culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. This is notably the case with the

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<sup>3</sup> Borges, “Allegories”, 340.

three central chapters, and particularly Chapters 1 and 2, on poetics and drama, domains where allegory remains a relatively neglected and even controversial topic, and where many of the insights of modern allegory scholarship are yet to be fully acknowledged. Here, indeed, it is still necessary to demonstrate the simple fact of the presence and continuity of the allegorical tradition, before being able to proceed to more complex levels of analysis. At a broader level, however, the thesis is also intended as a contribution to the emerging field of allegory studies, and seeks not merely to disprove the decline-of-allegory framework in its classic form – indeed it proceeds throughout on the premise that this has, for the most part, already been accomplished – but also to understand it. Having outlived its scholarly usefulness, this framework has now itself become an episode in the history of the Western allegorical tradition, and the present study, in equal parts history and metahistory, hopes to shed light on its origins, development, and ongoing influence in literary and intellectual history.

The question, then, is no longer simply that of whether allegory is premodern, (early) modern, or postmodern, or whether this or that period in literary history is pro-, anti-, or neo-allegorically inclined. It is rather a matter of carefully delineating what is at stake in these and other related questions, on what grounds they have been raised and answered, what they really mean, and why they continue to matter. That they do continue to matter is clear enough. If anything, recent decades have only seen them multiply, so that today we must also ask ourselves what it means to look at early modern allegory from a vantage point informed by, although not necessarily aligned with, the late twentieth-century “return of allegory”, pioneered by Walter Benjamin, continued by such figures as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul de Man, and subsequently widely disseminated in contemporary literary studies, art history, and other corners of the humanities. This attempt to reverse the previously dominant view of allegory as an outlived hermeneutic, literary and artistic practice is another key circumstance in which asking Borges’ question today differs drastically from asking it back in 1949, when Borges could still count on his readers to agree that “For all of us, allegory is an aesthetic

mistake”.<sup>4</sup> The fact that such a statement can no longer be made adds a polemical urgency to any contemporary inquiry into the subject that would not have been there just a few decades ago, and probably puts us at an advantage, whatever our personal aesthetic preferences might be, over scholars to whom allegory was either something long dead and buried, or simply timeless and universal.

To summarize, in examining the role of allegory in the literature and intellectual culture of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England – especially in domains where the subject has been neglected, and especially with respect to its complex and contested relations to the notion of this period’s (early) modernity – the thesis is primarily intended as a contribution to English literary and intellectual history. It thus includes a series of detailed engagements and close readings of particular literary and non-literary texts of the stated period, including such canonical staples as Sidney’s *Defence of Poesy*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, or Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, but also numerous other works and traditions, less well known, but no less important in the present context. On a broader level, the thesis is also intended as a contribution to the more comprehensive project of allegory studies, understood as an emergent nexus of interdisciplinary scholarship aimed at tackling those comprehensive and fundamental issues raised by the phenomenon of allegory that transcend particular discipline-, period-, or author-focused contexts. These two interests are seen as complementary and indeed interdependent: only in this wider perspective can the specific features of the allegory-modernity problem in the period under investigation here fully emerge into relief; conversely, only a close engagement with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts can provide us with reliable information on which to base our estimates of this period’s place in the broader movements of the Western allegorical tradition.

Above all, the thesis hopes to demonstrate the signal importance of the allegory-modernity problem. Even as contemporary scholarship on allegory grows increasingly comprehensive and sophisticated, commentary on this particular issue, one of crucial importance to any advanced understanding of the Western allegorical tradition, has largely

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 337.

remained sporadic, sketchy, and inconclusive. The thesis hopes to provide a more extensive and comprehensive investigation of this subject than has thus far been available, and one of additional interest for taking its point of departure in the most important and most contested period – apart from our own, perhaps – in the history of the allegorical tradition. In doing so, it hopes to facilitate and encourage further iterations of Borges’ old and perhaps ultimately unanswerable question, which remains one of the great riddles of literary and intellectual history.

## II

As already mentioned, around the middle of the twentieth century the scholarship which challenged and ultimately overthrew the classic decline-of-allegory narrative was still confined to the specialist, and we cannot expect Borges and most non-specialist thinkers of his time to be familiar with the work of such scholars of the Renaissance mythological tradition as Don Cameron Allen, the studies emerging from the Warburg circle, or the pioneering studies of allegory in classical antiquity.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, many of the older works touching on the subject, or recent ones of a more general appeal, would have only confirmed Borges’ views. Significantly, the authorities he does cite – Schopenhauer, De Quincey, de Sanctis, Croce, Chesterton – are not, or are only in a lesser degree, scholars and literary historians, and the latest of the references dates from 1904. Thus a well educated non-specialist could, in 1949, find an array of aesthetic and more broadly philosophical discussions of allegory, yet the best scholarship on the subject was probably out of their reach. Moreover, such scholarship was itself scarce, and even the specialists remained largely confined to their own and directly neighbouring fields. In an admittedly crude summary, it

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<sup>5</sup> See D. C. Allen, “Symbolic Color in the Literature of the English Renaissance”, *PQ* (1936): 81-92, p. 81: “The indebtedness of the so-called Renaissance to the Middle Ages increases with every new investigation of their relationships; and one is often led to wonder if the term ‘Renaissance’ is not a misnomer and if one would not be right, if one referred to this period as ‘the later Middle Ages’”; J. Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* [1940] (1953; repr. Princeton, 1995), 3: “As the Middle Ages and the Renaissance come to be better known, the traditional antithesis between them grows less marked.” On early studies of allegory in antiquity, see n. 11 below.

could be said that philosophers realized the importance of a comprehensive investigation of the subject, but that their attempts at such an investigation lack a reliable scholarly basis, whereas the scholars had such a basis, yet lacked this broader purview.

All of that was to change, however, within just a few years of Borges' essay, and by 1966, Rosemond Tuve would be able to note that the "number of words spent defining and delimiting allegory in this decade could never have been foretold two generations ago".<sup>6</sup> The crucial development, however, was not merely quantitative, but qualitative. Traditionally, allegory had been, and remains, of interest primarily in art history, aesthetics, and literary studies, and also, in its interpretive aspect, in various domains of intellectual history, as well as theology and patristics. Within English literary studies, scholarship on the subject has concentrated in the medieval period (and, as the exception proving the rule, Spenser studies, due largely to the importance of *The Faerie Queene* as England's most accomplished achievement in the genre of the Renaissance epic). Since the middle of twentieth century, however, and especially since Angus Fletcher's seminal study, allegory has been increasingly recognized as a subject in its own right, informed by, but not limited to, the said disciplines and period- or author-specific contexts.<sup>7</sup> So conceived, allegory studies have been gaining momentum, especially over the past two decades, which have, along with a steady stream of specialized studies, seen such publications as an *Encyclopedia of Allegorical Literature*, a *Dictionary of Allegorical Meanings*, a pioneering collaborative history of allegorical interpretation in the West, and most recently, comprehensive volumes in the New Critical Idiom and Cambridge Companions series.<sup>8</sup> A growing number of scholars have been

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<sup>6</sup> *Allegorical Imagery* (Princeton, 1966), 3.

<sup>7</sup> See A. Fletcher, *Allegory* (1964; repr. Princeton, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> See D. A. Leeming and K. M. Drowne, *Encyclopedia of Allegorical Literature* (Santa Barbara, 1996); H. D. Brumble, *Classical Myths and Legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Westport, 1998); *Allegory and Interpretation*, ed. J. Whitman (Leiden, 2000); J. Tambling, *Allegory* (London, 2010); *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. R. Copeland and P. T. Struck (Cambridge, 2010). An invaluable survey of modern scholarship on allegory up to the 1990s, and especially allegorical interpretation, is found in Whitman's *Allegory and Interpretation*, 3-70, 259-314. In addition to those already mentioned, general book-length studies, collection, and special issues – i.e., those focusing on more than one historical period, author, or work – which are omitted from or post-date Whitman's survey include E. Douglass Leyburn, *Satiric Allegory* (New Haven, 1956); L. Broussard, *American Drama* (Norman, 1962); J. MacQueen, *Allegory* (London, 1970); C. Gay, *The Transformations of Allegory* (London, 1974); *Allegory and Representation*, ed. S. J. Greenblatt (Baltimore, 1981); *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*, ed. M. W. Bloomfield (Cambridge, Mass., 1981); M. Warner, *Monuments and Maidens* (1985; repr. London, 1996); P. de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, 1979); C. Van Dyke,



approaching allegory without disciplinary or chronological restrictions, and even the phrase “allegory studies” has already made a few appearances in the recent work on the subject, most notably Gordon Teskey’s *Allegory and Violence*, where we find an admirably lucid statement of the imperative of “open[ing] up the field of allegory studies by asking questions about what lies beneath the phenomenon under analysis”, and what “broader human problems motivate allegorical expression”.<sup>9</sup> By all accounts, then, research on allegory is outgrowing traditional disciplinary models in favour of an interdisciplinary formation in its own right, and the present study draws on, and seeks to contribute to, this work.

The allegory-modernity problem is an exemplary instance of the need for such a widened perspective. Allegory is everything traditional scholarship says it is: a rhetorical figure, a mode of literary and artistic representation, and of religious as well as secular hermeneutics. It is, however, much more than that. The cluster of interrelated phenomena for which the term *allegory* has emerged as the most convenient short-hand is a protean cultural force which has left a deep imprint on the Western tradition, and whose full significance and impact are yet to be fully unravelled. How such a perspective illuminates the study of particular texts and periods will emerge repeatedly in the course of this study, but its single greatest significance lies in the sheer monolithic continuity of the allegorical tradition that it has brought to light. It is impossible to comprehend the broader relevance and dynamics of the allegory-modernity nexus, and the critical place of the sixteenth and seventeenth century in any attempt to come to terms with it, without taking into account the two millennia of

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*The Fiction of Truth* (Ithaca, 1985); J. Whitman, *Allegory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987); *Enlightening Allegory*, ed. K. L. Cope (New York, 1993); D. L. Madsen, *Rereading Allegory* (New York, 1994); D. L. Madsen, *Allegory in America* (Basingstoke, 1995); G. Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, 1996); T. M. Kelley, *Reinventing Allegory* (Cambridge, 1997); S. N. Greenfield, *The Ends of Allegory* (Newark, 1998); S. Brittan, *Poetry, Symbol, and Allegory* (Charlottesville, 2003); *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition*, ed. G. R. Boys-Stones (Oxford, 2003); J. K. Brown, *The Persistence of Allegory* (Philadelphia, 2007); J. H. Anderson, *Reading the Allegorical Intertext* (New York, 2008); J. E. Petrolle, *Religion without Belief* (Albany, 2008); *Thinking Allegory Otherwise*, ed. B. Machosky (Stanford, 2010); “Cognitive Allegory”, *Metaphor and Symbol* 26 (2011), ed. R. A. Harris and S. Tolmie; G. Johnson, *The Vitality of Allegory* (Columbus, 2012); *Allegorical Quests*, ed. M. Nievergelt (Woodbridge, 2012); K. Kerr-Koch, *Romancing Fascism* (New York, 2013); B. Machosky, *Structures of Appearing* (New York, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Teskey, *Allegory*, xii. In addition to works referenced here and elsewhere in the thesis, my views are also greatly indebted to the experience of organizing and participating in the conference *Allegory Studies?*, which sought to explore and promote such an approach to allegory scholarship. The conference took place at the University of Warwick on 7 November 2013, bringing together delegates from a number of British universities, as well as Israel, the United States, and Switzerland, and from a wide array of disciplines and specializations (art history, classics, psychology, philosophy, literary theory, and various periods in literary studies).

essentially unbroken, although not uncontested, allegorical tradition in the West. Specifically, it is impossible to comprehend the radical nature of the anti-allegorical aesthetic that Borges could still take for granted as a common cultural possession of the mid-twentieth-century man of letters, or how radical in turn, and for that very fact, is the rehabilitation of allegory that has taken place since.

Coextensive with Western civilization itself, the allegorical tradition begins already with some of the earliest known interpreters of Homeric epic and other mythological poetry of archaic Greece, shadowy sixth-century figures like Pherecydes of Syros or Theagenes of Rhegium.<sup>10</sup> Europe's oldest surviving manuscript of intellectual relevance records an allegorical exposition of a mythological poem by an unidentified interpreter from the fifth

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<sup>10</sup> One of the most important developments in modern allegory studies has been the revolution in the scholarship on the subject in the classical period, including the appearance of translations of many of the key primary sources. Early work includes a dissertation by A. Bates Hersman, *Studies in Greek Allegorical Interpretation* (Chicago, 1906); a series of articles by J. Tate – “The Beginnings of Greek Allegory”, *The Classical Review* 41 (1927): 214-15; “Cornutus and the Poets”, *CQ* 23 (1929): 41-5; “Plato and Allegorical Interpretation”, *CQ* 23 (1929): 142-54, 24 (1930): 1-10; “On the History of Allegorism”, *CQ* 28 (1934): 105-14; and in the 1950s, book-length studies by F. Buffière, *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris, 1956), and J. Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie* (Paris, 1958). Until very recently, however, this work had failed to make a larger impact, and classical studies were dominated by their own variant of the decline-of-allegory narrative, seen most graphically in the complete absence of the allegorists from such major histories and anthologies of ancient literary criticism as *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. G. Kennedy (Cambridge, 1989), *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. P. Murray (1965; repr. London, 2004), or *Ancient Literary Criticism*, ed. D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1972). The tradition is also neglected in general histories of literary criticism (see below, ch. 2, n. 29). This bias has now been criticized by A. Ford, *The Origins of Criticism* (Princeton, 2002), 81-5, and more cogently, P. T. Struck, *The Birth of the Symbol* (Princeton, 2004), 1-20, who explicitly challenges the “view expressed among some scholars that allegorism is rare in the extant evidence, outside the main currents of ancient reading, and generally concentrated in the later periods. For reasons that are not at all clear to me, for example, Tate, who did the most important work on the allegorists early in the last century, assures us that allegory was ‘never, it be noted, popular among the Greeks’” (17). The reason, surely, is precisely the same as in the case of the decline-of-allegory narrative applied to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Indeed, these are really two sides of the same narrative, both bent on quarantining allegory to the interim of the Middle Ages, so that an allegory-free antiquity can be reborn in an allegory-free Renaissance. The view of ancient allegory as rare, late, or unpopular is, however, untenable: “At least half a dozen major allegorical tracts survive [...], roughly equivalent to the number of major tracts that survive from the rhetorical tradition of reading, and allegorical commentary is as well represented in the scholia as other kinds. [...] Considering time distribution, a large group of allegorical works survives from the early and late Roman periods – but this is not much different from the distribution of tracts of rhetorical criticism. [...] we have indication enough that allegoresis forms a more or less continuous strand of literary thinking through the classical, Hellenistic, and early- and late-Roman periods” (ibid., 17-18). Struck also comments perceptively on the broader significance of integrating the ancient allegorists into the broader purview of the history of literary criticism: “Without reckoning the ancient developments of allegory within the context of literary criticism more generally, it becomes impossible to discern the history that runs from ancient to modern symbol theories” (13). Even in recent publications, however, we are still more likely to read that “allegorism properly speaking [...] was a product of the early Roman Empire and became a clearly defined activity only in the context of the culture wars between the polytheist tradition and the monotheists [...] – that is, from the 1st century CE to the 6th”; R. Lamberton, “Allegory”, in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. A. Grafton, G. W. Most, and S. Settis (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), 34-5.

century BC.<sup>11</sup> This predates by some centuries the first recorded instance of the word *allegory* itself, but what early Greek commentators variously refer to as “riddles” (*ainigmata*), “speaking in riddles” (*ainittesthai*), “under-meanings” (*huponoiai*), or “symbols” (*sumbola*) is more or less synonymous with what would by Plutarch’s time be most commonly known as *allegoria*.<sup>12</sup> Personified abstractions in Greek literature and art also appear at a very early date.<sup>13</sup> Eventually allegorical art and hermeneutics pass into the Christian tradition, where, beginning with Prudentius’ *Psychomachia* in the late fourth century AD, the mode of literary composition based entirely or predominantly on personified abstractions also emerges. The tradition thrives, in both its compositional and hermeneutic aspects, throughout the span of European history usually divided into the “Middle Ages” and the “Renaissance” or “early modern” period.

When exactly the tradition loosed its grip on Western culture remains a matter of debate, as do the very criteria to be employed in this debate. As might be expected, in resisting the old decline-of-allegory narrative some scholars have pushed the opposite, persistence-of-allegory thesis to an equally unacceptable extreme, positing its survival even beyond the point – the later eighteenth century or so – where anti-allegorical aesthetics appears in explicit and increasingly influential form.<sup>14</sup> Where the older view of the allegory-

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<sup>11</sup> This is the so-called Derveni Papyrus, uncovered during archaeological excavations in northern Greece in 1962, and the subject of ongoing study and debate. The authoritative edition is *The Derveni Papyrus*, ed. T. Kouremenos, G. M. Parássoglou, and K. Tsantsanoglou (Florence, 2006); see also *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus*, ed. A. Laks and G. W. Most (Oxford, 1997); G. Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus* (Cambridge, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> The term breaks down etymologically into *allos*, “other”, and *agoreuein*, “to speak in the *agora*”, the public assembly as well as the open market of the Greek city state, with “the resulting composite connot[ing] both that which was said in *secret*, and that which was *unworthy* of the *crowd*” (Whitman, *Allegory*, 263). “These two connotations”, Whitman elaborates, “of the word ‘allegory’ – guarded language and elite language – became explicit parts of allegorical theory and practice. The sense of secretive, guarded language had special importance for political allegory, in which the allegorist spoke, as it were, other than in the official assembly. The sense of elite, superior language had particular point in religious and philosophic contexts, in which the allegorist spoke other than in the common market place.” A substantial part of the current enthusiasm for the term *allegory* would seem to derive from the fact that its etymological meaning is often given simply as “other-speaking”, which resonates suggestively with the various uses in contemporary philosophy and literary theory of the notion of the “other”, but ignores these additional connotations of *agoreuein*.

<sup>13</sup> See H. A. Shapiro, *Personifications in Greek Art* (Kilchberg, 1993). The earliest literary instances are found in the *Iliad*, although Shapiro acknowledges the “very curious” absence of personifications from the *Odyssey*, and the fact that most of those in the *Iliad* appear in passages that have been suspected as later interpolations (23-4). The earliest instances in art are said to date to the sixth century.

<sup>14</sup> A notable case in point is Brown’s *Persistence of Allegory*, a study with a commendably comprehensive agenda, and not without numerous valuable insights, yet whose central thesis is maintained only at the expense of severe concessions as to what counts as “persistence”, and what one means by “allegory”. Thus Brown writes that “personification allegory persisted in painting into the eighteenth century, and even as an archaism in public

modernity dynamic was heavily distorted, this other extreme is even more problematic, for here this dynamic is ignored altogether. It would also be possible to rewrite the history of the Western allegorical tradition as a gigantomachy, an age-long struggle between competing pro- and anti-allegorical tendencies present in any given historical period: Plato vs. Aristotle, Alexandria vs. Antioch, Typical Medieval Exegete vs. Nicholas of Lyra, Catholicism vs. Protestantism, and so forth. Yet while it is important to acknowledge that the allegorical tradition was in no period entirely uncontested, it is equally important to acknowledge that in the case of all these contestations until the eighteenth century and the Romantics, the allegorical tradition invariably retained the dominant position. The fate of Aristotle's *Poetics* is instructive: the one surviving ancient treatise on poetry to omit any recourse to allegory – which, given the prevalence of allegorical poetics in Aristotle's day, is more than a simple omission, and must be interpreted as a conscious rejection of this poetics – is also the one which ended up being all but lost to the world for almost two thousand years, and even when “rediscovered” at the end of the fifteenth century, remained subject to radical misinterpretation for a long time to come, and was widely conflated with doctrines, including allegory, with which it is now perceived to be utterly incompatible.<sup>15</sup>

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art of the nineteenth and twentieth century. The persistence of comparable representation in drama is the thesis of this study” (1). But this is more fitly described as the decline or afterlife of allegory than its persistence as a vital artistic and hermeneutic doctrine: “in the natural inertia of things, rhetorics of representation, like other cultural practices, persist – often in the popular arena – long after they cease to be current and have lost their original meaning” (2). Such a catch-all approach is further facilitated by a dubious definition of the terms *allegory* and *mimesis*: “Treating allegory and mimesis as a dyad is intended to neutralize their instability: where their precise meaning is unclear they can still be understood in terms of their mutual difference. Mimesis is ‘realistic,’ it ‘imitates’ what is natural and materially real. Allegory, by contrast, represents something other than what it appears to claim (from the Greek ‘allos’ = other). In mimetic representation one knows what one is looking at, assuming one can recognize the outlines, so to speak, but in allegory either the name or the ontological level must always be changed. By allegory I understand, basically, a mode of representation which renders the supernatural visible, by mimesis a mode which imitates the natural, what is already visible” (5).

<sup>15</sup> Two places in the *Poetics* are of particular importance in this respect. The first is ch. 25, responding to the established, by Aristotle's time, genre of Homeric “problems” or “questions”, and thus precisely the section in which we would expect to find an appeal to allegory. Instead, we find the unprecedented claim that “there is not the same kind of correctness in poetry as in politics, or indeed any other art” – a claim which wholly obviates the need for, indeed denies the validity of, the allegorical approach; Aristotle, *Poetics*, 60b14-15, in *The Complete Works*, ed. J. Barnes (Princeton, 1989); unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Aristotle are from this edition. If ch. 25 is a condensed summary of the argument pursued at length in the lost *Homeric Problems* – as argued, among others, by S. Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (1986; repr. Chicago, 1998), 265-6 *et passim* – then this work must have contained a more explicit confrontation with the allegorists. The other element is Aristotle's censure of the “riddle” or “enigma” (*ainigma*) at 58a24-30: this occurs in the discussion of figurative language rather than hermeneutics, but given the prevalence of *ainigma* and its cognates in the “allegorical” tradition at this period – on which see Ford, *Origins*, 74, and Struck, *Birth*, 3, n. 1 – another quiet dismissal of that tradition may reasonably be inferred. On the conflation of the “rediscovered” *Poetics* with doctrines now recognized as

It would thus be the gravest of errors to underestimate the radical – indeed, for all we know today, possibly unique – nature of the period between c. 1750 and 1950. Anti-allegorical sentiment will be found in any age, but this is the only period in Western history in which this sentiment is dominant, and where allegory is not merely dethroned, but is demoted to the lowest possible status, or even banished entirely from the domain of serious art and imaginative literature. Linguistic and terminological barriers aside, a time-traveller from the sixteenth century would have an easier time coming to an understanding on this subject with Theagenes of Rhegium than with Hegel. Conversely, it is no surprise to find a major precursor of modern aesthetics like Francis Bacon so profoundly isolated in his own age as to wonder whether what he is thinking “would occur to anyone again in the future”.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, in speculating on the history of allegory in its broadest dimensions, both traps are to be avoided: the old trap of having allegory sharply decline at the close of the so-called Middle Ages, and the new trap of naively extending its persistence even beyond 1750 or thereabout. The recent rehabilitation of the term is itself a confirmation of this claim, for had allegory simply persisted throughout 1750-1950 there would be nothing to rehabilitate.

The peculiarity of our moment in time, then, as opposed to Borges’ in 1949, is that to us aesthetic modernity can begin to seem as something which has ended – and indeed this is what many claim had happened, and what the advent of the notions of postmodernity and postmodernism attempts to canonize – whereas to Borges it probably seemed not only as still lasting, but as something that could never end. The implications of this “forgetting of modernism” – either ominous or auspicious, depending on where one stands – are yet to be unravelled, and their importance in the study of the allegorical tradition cannot be overemphasized. Nor can the imperative of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach. Students of modern literature cannot fully understand their subject – cannot understand the

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un-Aristotelian, see M. T. Herrick, *The Fusion of Horatian and Aristotelian Literary Criticism* (Urbana, 1946); B. Weinberg, “From Aristotle to Pseudo-Aristotle”, *Comparative Literature* 5 (1953): 97-104; and more elaborately Weinberg’s *History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago, 1961). The problem with Weinberg’s and most other work on this subject is that allegory is either ignored or treated inconsistently, as a side-interest, so that an investigation specifically into this issue remains a desideratum; see n. 32 below and ch. 1, p. 107.

<sup>16</sup> *The New Organon*, ed. L. Jardine and M. Silverthorne (Cambridge, 2000), 3-4. See further on Bacon below, ch. 1, pp. 110-31.

immense *significance* of their subject – without familiarizing themselves with the dominance of allegorical poetics from antiquity to c. 1750. In turn, students of the earlier periods need to look ahead and face up to the extraordinary fact that what had been a key doctrine of Western aesthetics for over two millennia was in less than two centuries proclaimed to be the very debasement and antithesis of art.

Only then will we be able, if nothing else, to at least summon the appropriate level of wonder at, say, that freezing night in December 1913, when a nineteen-year-old philology student rose from his table in a fashionable Saint Petersburg cabaret, emptied his glass, walked over to the podium, and intoned:

The creation of words is man's most ancient form of poetic creation. Today, words are dead, and language resembles a cemetery, whereas the word that had just come into being was imaginal and full of life. Every word is in its basis a trope. [...] And often, when one succeeds in reaching the image that had formed the basis of the word but that has been lost, obliterated, one is amazed at its beauty, a beauty that once was but is no more.

Or if not those very words, then certainly something to that effect, for the piece, entitled “The Place of Futurism in the History of Language”, formed the basis for Viktor Shklovsky's 1914 manifesto entitled *The Resurrection of the Word*, of which the above are the opening sentences.<sup>17</sup> Nothing less was the new poet's aim, and it could not have been a more urgent one, for the death of the word entailed the death of the world, and only in the resurrected word could life be saved from the all-devouring plague of “automatization”. But this required a very different kind of poetry, a poetry which was not *about* something, but which *was* that thing – and which thus, at least in theory, finds itself at the farthest imaginable remove from any allegorical poetics, ancient or modern.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> V. Shklovsky, *The Resurrection of the Word*, in *Russian Formalism*, ed. S. Bann and J. E. Bowlt (Edinburgh, 1973), 41. On the Stray Dog performance see K. Clark, *Petersburg* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 32.

<sup>18</sup> For an insightful discussion of this “Orphic” poetics, see G. Bruns, *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language* (1974; repr. Urbana-Champaign, 2001).

Of course the novelty should not be exaggerated, and in fact the phenomenon only gains in interest if it is traced back to the Romantics.<sup>19</sup> As somebody must have already noticed, Shklovsky seems to be almost paraphrasing Emerson's 1844 essay "The Poet":

The poets made all the words, and therefore language is the archives of history, and, if we must say, a sort of tomb for the muses. For though the origin of most of our words is forgotten, each word was at first a stroke of genius, and obtained currency because for the moment it symbolized the world to the first speaker and to the hearer. The etymologist finds the deadest word to have been once a brilliant picture. Language is fossil poetry. [...] language is made up of images or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin.<sup>20</sup>

Fully established with the early Romantics and omnipresent by Emerson's day, the sentiment reached its most complete and radical realization in the modernist avant-garde of the early twentieth century. In some cases, lines of influence can be traced. Remarkably, however, most of the resurrectors of the word seem to have sprung up independently of each other. Half a century after Shklovsky's youthful pamphlet, with which he was almost certainly not familiar, Borges employs the exact same expression, in almost exactly the same sense, when a book is said to be a "set of dead symbols" until "the right reader comes along, and the words – or rather the poetry behind the words, for the words themselves are mere symbols – spring to life, and we have a resurrection of the word."<sup>21</sup> "WORDS DIE", urged Aleksei Kruchenykh in another 1910s manifesto, yet "THE WORLD IS ETERNALLY YOUNG. The artist has seen the world in a new way and, like Adam, proceeds to give things his own names."<sup>22</sup> "Scattered in scattered capitals", Borges would write in 1969, "Solitary and many/ We played at being Adam/ Who first gave names to things".<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Although Shklovsky's more immediate debts may be to Russian philologists and critics such as Potebnia and Veselovsky: see S. Cassedy, *Flight from Eden* (Berkeley, 1990), 57-63.

<sup>20</sup> *Emerson's Literary Criticism*, ed. E. W. Carlson (Lincoln, 1995), 34. Also compare Emerson's description of language as "fossil poetry" to Shklovsky's claim that "Not only words and epithets fossilize, whole situations can fossilize too" (*Resurrection*, 43).

<sup>21</sup> J. L. Borges, *This Craft of Verse*, ed. C.-A. Mihăilescu (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), 4.

<sup>22</sup> A. Kruchenykh, "Declaration of the Word as Such" [1913], in *Words in Revolution*, ed. A. Lawton and H. Eagle (Washington, 2004), 67-68.

<sup>23</sup> J. L. Borges, "Invocation to Joyce", in *Selected Poems*, ed. A. Coleman (New York, 2000), 287. Examples could be multiplied indefinitely; for a perhaps less expected one, here is Heidegger in the 1935 lectures

This, in the crudest outlines, is the background against which Borges is able to say that “For all of us, allegory is an aesthetic mistake”. It cannot be otherwise, not once the notion of aesthetic autonomy is driven to its final consequences, not once “absolute artistic representation” is defined as that in which “the universal *is* wholly the particular, and the particular is at the same time wholly the universal, and does not simply mean it”, and where “Meaning [...] is simultaneously being itself, passed over into the object itself and one with it”.<sup>24</sup> This is why at the summit of modernist poetics we find a total negation of the hermeneutic impulse – as when Eliot writes that “*Qua* work of art, a work of art cannot be interpreted; there is nothing to interpret” – coupled with those seemingly paradoxical demands, which the too well known “Ars Poetica” of the otherwise largely forgotten Archibald MacLeish so perfectly exemplifies, for poems to be “wordless” (like music), “palpable and mute” (like sculptures), “motionless in time” (like paintings), and ultimately, to “not mean/ But be”.<sup>25</sup>

### III

It might seem as if all this has little to do with our histories of Renaissance literature, and the decline-of-allegory narrative which these have traditionally reproduced. In fact, however, the connection could not be closer, as this narrative is nothing other than a projection of modern anti-allegorism onto the historical plane. The Borges who played at being Adam is the same Borges who writes, towards the end of his essay on allegory, that

The passage from allegory to novel, from species to individual, from realism to nominalism, required several centuries, but I shall have the temerity to suggest an

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published as *Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven, 2000): “we seek to win back the naming force of language and words; for words and language are not just shells into which things are packed for spoken and written intercourse. In the word, in language, things first come to be and are. For this reason, too, the misuse of language in mere idle talk, in slogans and phrases, destroys our genuine relation to things”; the poet “always speaks as if beings were addressed and expressed for the first time. In the poetry of the poet and in the thinking of the thinker, there is always so much world-space to spare that each and every thing – a tree, a mountain, a house, the call of a bird – completely loses its indifference and familiarity” (15-28).

<sup>24</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art* [1859], ed. D. W. Stott (Minneapolis, 1989), 49.

<sup>25</sup> T. S. Eliot, “Hamlet and His Problems” [1919], in *The Sacred Wood* (London, 1920), 88; A. MacLeish, *Poems* (Boston, 1933), 122-3.



ideal date: the day in 1382 when Geoffrey Chaucer, who may not have believed himself to be a nominalist, set out to translate into English a line by Boccaccio – “*E con gli occulti ferri i Tradimenti*” (And Betrayal with hidden weapons) – and repeated it as “The smyler with the knyf under the cloke.” The original is in the seventh book of the *Teseide*; the English version, in “The Knightes Tale.”<sup>26</sup>

This is slightly unorthodox in that the proposed date is earlier than most similar accounts would have it, and that Chaucer is of course “medieval”, even when imitating his invariably “Renaissance” Italian contemporary. But then 1382 is late enough, and Chaucer’s visits to Italy and familiarity with Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio is exceptional and precociously proto-“Renaissance” in the English context – indeed, Chaucer’s place in literary history would be very different were it not for the incidental circumstance that his language, unlike that of his Italian contemporaries, became obsolete less than a century after his death.<sup>27</sup> Be that as it may, the central premises of this historiographical topos or myth, as it is perhaps best described, are fully present: whenever modern literature begins, that is where allegory ends, and 1382 is not too distant from the dates more commonly given for the end of the so-called Middle Ages.

More typical statements are easily found, for instance by Borges’ disciple Umberto Eco, assuring us that allegory “is perhaps [the] most typical aspect” of the “medieval aesthetic sensibility”, “the one which characterises the period above all others and which we tend to look upon as uniquely medieval”.<sup>28</sup> Many further examples will crop up in the following pages, many more could be submitted, and at any rate, what is controversial is neither the existence of the myth, nor the fact that it represents the most important and lastingly influential approach to the allegory-modernity problem, nor that it is invalidated by the best recent scholarship on the subject. What is at stake is its origin and rationale: how, when, and above all, why did this myth come into being? The so-called Middle Ages were certainly *an* age of allegory, but when did it become customary to think of this period as *the* age of

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<sup>26</sup> “Allegories”, 340.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. B. Boyd, “Whatever Happened to Chaucer’s Renaissance?”, *Fifteenth Century Studies* 1 (1978): 15-21.

<sup>28</sup> U. Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* [1959] (New Haven, 1986), 52.

allegory? Taking, then, the above premises as granted – that there is a myth of the Middle Ages as the age of allegory, that it is a powerful myth, and that it is, in fact, a myth – in this section I wish to briefly delineate its origins, development, and effect on (primarily English) literary historiography.

To begin to with the question of when, there are several stages of development to be discerned. There is, first of all, the matter of the very notion of the “Middle Ages”, and more specifically, of when this notion first makes itself felt in literary-historical contexts.<sup>29</sup> In England we may safely take this to occur by the early seventeenth century, when we find both the notion and the term itself present in William Camden’s 1605 *Remains... Concerning Britaine*, which contains the first historical account of English authors earlier than Chaucer.<sup>30</sup> At least from this point onward, the “Middle Ages” are a working concept in English literary history, regardless of how they are called, whether they are viewed positively or negatively, when they are believed to begin and end, and what exactly their defining features are presumed to be, all of which remains debatable for a long time to come.

At the same time, there is a rising sense of allegory as an outdated literary mode, belonging to a past literary epoch. Crucially, however, this past epoch is not identified with the Middle Ages. Things are well underway by 1695, when, for example, Richard Blackmore

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<sup>29</sup> There would seem to be a consensus that the concept of the middle age(s) – although not the term itself – originates with Petrarch in the fourteenth, continues to develop in various formulations over the fifteenth and the sixteenth, and reaches a degree of stability by the seventeenth century. See, among others, G. Gordon, “*Medium aevum* and the Middle Age”, *S. P. E. Tracts* 19 (1925): 3-26; T. E. Mommsen, “Petrarch’s Conception of the ‘Dark Ages’”, *Speculum* 17 (1942): 226-42; F. C. Robinson, “*Medieval, the Middle Ages*”, *Speculum* 59 (1984): 745-56; E. G. Stanley, “The Early Middle Ages”, in *The Middle Ages after the Middle Ages*, ed. M.-F. Alamichel and D. Brewer (Cambridge, 1997). On the corollary concept of the “Renaissance”, see W. K. Ferguson’s *The Renaissance in Historical Thought* (1948; repr. Toronto, 2006); J. Hale, *England and the Italian Renaissance*, 4th ed. (Malden, 2005); J. B. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford, 1994); W. Caferro, *Contesting the Renaissance* (Malden, 2011). What is insufficiently stressed in some of this literature is the fact that the “Middle Ages” and the “Renaissance” are, at least from Burckhardt onwards, mutually defining concepts, always evolving in relation to each other. Bullen, for example, writes that “One of the most unexpected features of the construction of what we call the Renaissance is how, in its early phases, it was intimately dependent on the discovery of the Middle Ages”, adding that “the Renaissance did not achieve a separate identity until the medieval period had been given historical substance” (*Myth*, 59). This is perfectly true, but the fact that Bullen found it “unexpected” as late as 1994 is illustrative of the need for a unified history of what are, both logically and empirically, interrelated, mutually defining concepts.

<sup>30</sup> Between antiquity and “this our learned age”, writes Camden, is interposed a “middle age, which was so ouercast with darke clouds, or rather thicke fogges of ignorance, that euery little sparke of liberal learning seemed wonderfull”; W. Camden, *Remaines of a Greater Worke, Concerning Britaine* (London, 1605), a1r-v, separately paginated. Camden includes early Celtic and Anglo-Saxon poetry, which he believes to be wholly lost, in the ancient rather than the medieval period. For a discussion of the formation of the pre-Chaucerian canon, see R. Terry, *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past* (Oxford, 2001), ch. 4.

finds the earlier allegorical epics of Ariosto and Spenser to be “so *wild, unnatural*, and *extravagant*, as greatly displease the reader. This way of writing mightily offends in this Age; and ’tis a wonder how it came to please in any”.<sup>31</sup> Blackmore, as we see, does not identify himself against the Middle Ages but against Ariosto and Spenser, and furthermore, the reason does not reside in allegory as such, but only a particular, outmoded style of allegorical writing – after all, the statement comes from the preface to Blackmore’s own Arthurian allegorical epic, in which allegory is explicitly required as an essential property of the genre.<sup>32</sup> Yet Blackmore’s is one of the last voices in this tradition. A year earlier, Addison had already expressed his disaffection with the manner of “Old *Spencer*” with an even stronger sense of historical distance:

now the Mystick Tale, that pleas’d of Yore,  
Can Charm an understanding Age no more;  
The long-spun Allegories fulsom grow,  
While the dull Moral lies too plain below.<sup>33</sup>

While this still nominally relates to Spenser and his age, “yet uncultivate and Rude”, it is clear that allegory as such is becoming a problem, and two decades later Addison includes it, without such mitigating qualifications, among “antiquated ways of Writing, which [...] had been laid aside, and forgotten for some Ages”.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> R. Blackmore, *Prince Arthur* (London, 1695), b2r.

<sup>32</sup> The epic poem is defined as “a feign’d or devis’d Story of an *Illustrious Action*, related in Verse, in an *Allegorical, Probable, Delightful* and *Admirable* manner, to cultivate the Mind with Instructions of Virtue. [...] The action must be related in an *Allegorical* manner; and this Rule is best observ’d, when as *Divines* speak; there is both a *Literal* Sense obvious to every Reader [...]; and besides another *Mystical* or *Typical* Sense, not hard to be discover’d by those Readers that penetrate the matter deeper” (ibid., a2v, b2r). Blackmore is probably following Le Bossu’s treatise, the English translation of which appeared in the same year: “The EPOPEA is a Discourse invented by Art, to form the Manners by such Instructions as are disguis’d under the Allegories of some one important Action, which is related in Verse, after a probable, diverting, and surprising Manner”; R. Le Bossu, A. Dacier, and B. Le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Monsieur Bossu’s Treatise of the Epick Poem... An Essay upon Satyr, by Monsieur D’Acier; and A Treatise upon Pastorals, by Monsieur Fontanelle* (London, 1695), B3v. Le Bossu also affords a particularly explicit example of the conflation of allegorical poetics with Aristotle’s notion of “the universal”: “in the *Epopoea*, according to *Aristotle*, let the Names be what they will, yet the *Persons* and the *Actions* are *Feign’d, Allegorical, and Vniversal*; not *Historical* and *Singular*” (B2v).

<sup>33</sup> “An Account of the Greatest English Poets”, in *The Annual Miscellany: for the Year 1694* (London, 1694), X7r-Y4r.

<sup>34</sup> The context of this statement is interesting. It comes from the introduction to Addison’s own sketch for an allegorical dispute in imitation of Spenser in *The Guardian* 152 (4 Sep 1713), on the fashionable topic of “the comparative Perfections and Pre-eminence of the two Sexes”: “I have also”, he writes, “by this means revived several antiquated ways of Writing, which though very instructive and entertaining, had been laid aside, and

A further development is found in the seminal work of Thomas Warton. Indeed, it is a matter of considerable interest that the origins of the first proper history of English literature are inextricably bound with Warton's inquiries specifically into the history of allegorical poetry in England. It has been shown that he was working on such a history already in the early 1750s, and one of his notebooks even contains what appears to be a prospective title: "The Rise & Progress of Allegoric Poetry in England 'till it's Consummation in Spenser; & it's Decline after him".<sup>35</sup> This is consistent with related statements in Warton's published works, according to which the English tradition of allegorical poetry begins in the Middle Ages, culminates with Spenser, and only then enters a phase of decline, expiring at some indefinite point between the later seventeenth century and Warton's day, by which time it "appears to have been for some time almost totally extinguished in England".<sup>36</sup> In Warton's *History of English Poetry* this view is not merely retained but is enriched by a classical background: in the last paragraph of the first volume, Warton comments on the "remarkable" circumstance that "allegorical personages" abound in ancient Greek and Roman poetry, citing instances in Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Ennius, and Lucretius.<sup>37</sup> To Warton, then, the allegorical tradition extends all the way from Homer to Spenser, and beyond, and it is in

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forgotten for some Ages. I shall in this place only mention those Allegories wherein Virtues, Vices and human passions are introduced as real Actors. Though this kind of composition was practiced by the finest Authors among the Ancients, our Countryman *Spencer* is the last Writer of Note who has applied himself to it with Success." It is abundantly clear, however, that the imitation falls far short of the original. Addison claims that he was "once thinking to have written a whole *Canto* in the Spirit of *Spencer*", yet finding "not time to accomplish this Work", he is presenting his readers with "the naked Fable, reserving the Embellishments of Verse and Poetry to another Opportunity". But the opportunity would never arise, and not because of a lack of time, but because allegory, having lost its ancient seat at the summit of Parnassus, had begun its long retreat to the regions of topical polemics, satire, and didactic or children's literature. Another of Addison's allegorical vignettes, in *The Spectator* 3 (3 March 1711), is on an even more disposably topical subject: "the Decay of Publick Credit, with the Methods of restoring it", starring Public Credit herself as "a beautiful Virgin seated on a Throne of Gold".

<sup>35</sup> See D. Fairer, "The Origins of Warton's *History of English Poetry*", *RES*, n.s., 32 (1981): 37-63, p. 51.

<sup>36</sup> T. Warton, *The History of English Poetry* (London, 1774-1806?), 2: 257. Cf. the digression on the history of allegorical poetry in Warton's *Observations on the Faerie Queene* (London, 1754), Hh2v: "After the FAERIE QUEENE, allegory began to decline", rediscovering "somewhat of its native splendour in the PURPLE ISLAND of Fletcher, with whom it almost as soon disappear'd". The revised version of this section in the second edition (London, 1762) states even more explicitly that "allegorical poetry, through many gradations, at last received its ultimate consummation in the Fairy Queen" (2: P4v), and notes that the history of allegorical poetry "may, probably, be one day considered more at large, in a regular history" (2: O3r).

<sup>37</sup> Warton returns to the subject of allegory, this time with specific emphasis on allegorical interpretation, in the closing passages of the "Digression on the *Gesta Romanorum*" prefixed to the third volume, published in 1781. "This was", he writes, "an age of vision and mystery: and every work was believed to contain a double, or secondary, meaning" (3: xciv-xcv) – but the "age" in question again extends to Ariosto and Spenser, and beyond.

reference to this whole tradition that he can now write: “As knowledge and learning increase, poetry begins to deal less in imagination: and these fantastic beings give way to real manners and living characters”.<sup>38</sup> This is another key component of the myth: the idea that allegory does not fall victim to merely random or cyclical turns of literary taste, but that this decline is symptomatic of a deeper teleological pattern, of literary progress rather than simply literary *change*, which is itself an aspect of the general progress of human civilization. The “Middle Ages”, however, in any sense that would make them sharply distinguishable from a “Renaissance”, are still not a significant factor in Warton’s thinking.

These developments can be further tracked through the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The increasing hostility towards allegory receives a more articulate theoretical form in the Romantic aesthetics of the symbol, which finds its earliest English representative in Coleridge.<sup>39</sup> In the same way, out of the increasing sense of historical distance there eventually emerges a more definite notion of an age of allegory as an identifiable episode in literary history, and even the very phrase, “the age of allegory”, begins to appear. Yet even at this late date, the age of allegory is not restricted to the Middle Ages as we know them today. In fact, in most instances I have been able to find up to the mid-nineteenth century, the phrase refers specifically to the Elizabethan period.<sup>40</sup> In other cases, it is perceived to last well into the eighteenth century. In 1785, an author in *The Critical Review* censures a contemporary work of allegorical fiction as old-fashioned: “The age of allegory”, he asserts, “is now past”.<sup>41</sup> Note, however, that it is *now* past, still fresh in memory.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Warton, *History*, 1: 468.

<sup>39</sup> The scholarship on the subject is extensive; for a study particularly attuned to the contradictions and ambivalences of the Romantic statements, see Kelley’s *Reinventing Allegory*, ch. 5-6.

<sup>40</sup> See L. Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, ed. J. Hoole (London, 1783), 3: 260; *Old English Plays*, [ed. C. W. Dilke] (London, 1814-16), 2: 3; anonymous review of *Characters of Shakespear’s Plays, Lectures on the English Poets, and Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, by W. Hazlitt, *The Monthly Review* 92 (1820): 53-68, p. 63; E. P. Hood, *The Good Old Times of Queen Bess* (London, 1851), 22.

<sup>41</sup> [J. Buckland?], review of *The Adventures of the Six Princesses of Babylon*, by L. Peacock, *The Critical Review* 60 (1785): 221-2. The review is signed “Buckland” – presumably James Buckland, “upwards of 50 years an eminent bookseller in Paternoster-row”, who died in 1790 at the age of 79, according to the obituary in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* 60 (1790), 186. James Buckland’s dates would appear to fit those of this and other reviews signed “Buckland” in *The Critical Review*, and the subjects of the reviewed works – mostly religious, devotional, and didactic literature – fit those of works published by his press.

<sup>42</sup> Buckland says further of his “now past” allegorical age that “The luxuriance of Hawkesworth, and the energy of Johnson, for some time supported it; but their labours, in this mode of instruction, are, we believe, less popular than any other parts of their lucubrations”. Buckland’s review is probably echoed, in addition to

Alternatively, even manifestly allegorical works can still be enjoyable, provided that their allegorical dimension is ignored. “The fact”, writes Schopenhauer in one of the *loci classici* of anti-allegorical aesthetics, “that Correggio’s *Night*, Annibale Carracci’s *Genius of Fame*, Poussin’s *Horae* are very beautiful pictures must be clearly separated from the fact that they are allegories.”<sup>43</sup> By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Hazlitt felt comfortable in making a virtue out of such under-reading, chastising those contemporaries who complained about Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* because they could not follow the allegory: “If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them. Without minding it at all, the whole is as plain as a pike-staff”.<sup>44</sup> “It might as well be pretended”, he goes on to say, “that we cannot see Poussin’s pictures for the allegory, as that the allegory prevents us from understanding Spenser.” The analogy with painting is not incidental. In painting, as well as in music, sculpture, or architecture, allegory involves not only multiple meanings but also multiple media. While a painting is a visual phenomenon, allegorical meaning – arguably all *meaning* in so far as it can be distinguished from, say, enjoyment or experience – is at bottom a verbal phenomenon. The very etymology of the Greek *allegoria* or Latin *alieniloquium*, “other-speaking”, would seem to draw attention to this fact. Thus to attribute an allegorical meaning to a painting is not only to superimpose a further level of meaning onto the basic, “literal” one, but also to superimpose a verbal upon a non-verbal medium. Consequently,

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Addison’s “Account”, in another similar statement appearing in 1801: “The age of allegory is past; and readers speedily lose their patience, when *the dull moral lies too plain below*”; review of *Richard the First*, by J. B. Burges, *The Monthly Review* 37 (1802): 287-91, p. 288. As late as 1866, the pioneering history of English painting by the brothers Redgrave explains the failure of the allegorical representation of the Battle of Waterloo commissioned in 1815 from the painter James Ward by noting: “The fact was, the age of allegory was past, and all the munificence of the donors, combined with Ward’s real talent as a painter could not revive it”; R. and S. Redgrave, *A Century of Painters of the English School* (London, 1866), 2: 150. Allegory plays the same role in the Redgraves’ history of painting as it does in contemporary histories of literary criticism and the drama. The list of contents for ch. 2 includes the heading “Art run mad with Allegory”, referring to what the authors see as a degenerative period following the brief flowering of the arts under Charles I: “Among the causes of its decline – in which political events had undoubtedly for a time the chief share – was the tendency of the age to allegory” (1: 35). Rubens’ achievements in the mode are “nobly extravagant”, but in the hands of less talented imitators “such displays soon descended to vapid inanities”. The Redgraves refer sarcastically to the “great authority” of H. Peacham, quoting liberally (1: 35-6) from the prescriptions for the representation of personifications and allegorized classical deities in his *Compleat Gentleman*, first published in 1622, with an obvious delight in pointing out those they find the most absurd. “Armed with such traditions, [...] the fashionable painters of the end of the seventeenth century covered the walls of our palaces with acres of allegory, appropriately tenanted.” Some did better than others, but the manner as such “we may despise”; it is a “degradation of art” (1: 37).

<sup>43</sup> A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, ed. J. Norman, A. Welchman, and C. Janaway (Cambridge, 2010), 264.

<sup>44</sup> W. Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets* (London, 1818), 74.

when the ideological currency of the allegorical meaning runs out, this meaning appears all the more arbitrary and detachable from the “work itself”.<sup>45</sup>

Thus all the main components of the myth are in place by the mid-eighteenth century or so, but the dots are not yet connected. Who, then, connects the dots? Here, as in so much else, all roads would seem to lead to Jacob Burckhardt and his 1860 *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, the book in which we meet, apparently for the first time, with a categorical claim that “The Middle Ages were essentially the ages of allegory”.<sup>46</sup> Even if there is some precedent for the substance of this claim, nothing would seem to approximate the axiomatic force with which it appears, and the central position it occupies, in Burckhardt’s work, which thus seems the likeliest source for most subsequent developments.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> “[G]iven a statue of a beautiful woman”, writes Croce in 1902, “the sculptor can attach a label to it saying that the statue represents *Clemency* or *Goodness*. This allegorical interpretation, which is added, *post festum*, to the completed work, does not change the work of art. What is it, then? It is an expression added extrinsically to another expression” – or more precisely, “nothing other than a word: ‘clemency’ or ‘goodness’”; B. Croce, *The Aesthetic* [1902] (Cambridge, 1992), 39. It seems clear that such treatments of allegory in the fine arts exerted a certain amount of influence on its treatment in literature, especially once modernist aesthetics began insisting on the reformation of the literary art on analogy with the “purer”, i.e. non-verbal arts. A century later, we still read that “The problem of preserving interest in *The Faerie Queene* is one of the live problems of the modern teacher of literature”, and that “The most common advice as to the best method of accomplishing this is to ignore the allegory, and to emphasize the pictorial and imaginative qualities, and the metrical beauty”; H. W. Peck, “Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and the Student of To-day”, *The Sewanee Review* 24 (1916): 340-52, p. 347. This statement makes for a good example of the reverse side of the phenomenon already touched on above: if allegory converts images, shapes, and music into words, the opposite approach entails the conversion of words into images, shapes, and music.

<sup>46</sup> J. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of Renaissance in Italy* [1860] (1945; repr. London, 1995), 262. The original is perhaps even slightly more emphatic: “Das ganze Mittelalter war die Zeit des Allegorisierens in vorzugsweisem Sinne gewesen”; “the entire Middle Ages had in the foremost sense been the age of allegorizing”; *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (Leipzig, 1926), 356.

<sup>47</sup> An identification of allegory with the Middle Ages is strongly implied in a manuscript fragment by Michelet, dated 21 June 1841 and first published in H. Hauser, “Quelques fragments inédits de Michelet”, *Revue du seizième siècle* 2 (1914): 19-29, where Michelangelo is said to have “spent his energy in trying to break down the life of the Middle Ages in order to escape into the future, to avoid conventional symbolism, to express death and the spirit through the forms of life and nature”; the translation (slightly adapted) is from Bullen, *Myth*, 159. Hegel might seem a precursor, but although he notes in the *Aesthetics* that “allegory” – by which he largely or exclusively means personification – “in general belongs less to ancient art than to the romantic art of the Middle Ages”, the explanation of this is thoroughly un-Burckhardian. Far from essentially, allegory is only accidentally medieval, for “as allegory it is not properly anything romantic”, and is rather due to the absence of the pagan pantheon, through which the universal was expressed in the classical period; G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics* (1975; repr. Oxford, 1988), 1: 401. “On the one side the Middle Ages had for their content” – as they emphatically do not in Burckhardt – “particular individuals, with their subjective aims of love and honour, with their vows, pilgrimages, and adventures. The variety of these numerous individuals and events provides imagination with a wide scope for inventing and developing accidental and capricious collisions and their resolution. But, on the other side, over against the varied secular adventures, there stands the universal element in the relations and situations of life. This universal is not individualized into independent gods as it was with the ancients, and therefore it appears readily and naturally explicitly sundered in its universality alongside those particular personalities and their particular shapes and events” (1: 401-02).

In explaining how Burckhardt came to hold such a view, it is instructive to first take a brief look at his guide to Renaissance art, *The Cicerone*, published five years before the *Civilization*, in 1855. Unlike the *Civilization*, *The Cicerone* contains explicit statements of Burckhardt's distaste for allegory, occasionally rising to the level of axioms: "A work of art", we read, "will be impressive in proportion as it contains less allegory and more living distinct action".<sup>48</sup> Ideally, art "ought never to be founded on" it, for the result is "necessarily false", and a modern aesthetic sensibility cannot fail to note the "insufficiency of all Allegory". An instructive palette of epithets is bestowed upon it: "absurd" is a favourite – with varying degrees, from "simple" to "extreme" – but allegory is also "false", "quaint", "naïve", "insignificant", "unpleasing", "comically pitiful", and so forth.<sup>49</sup> And yet, allegory is everywhere in Renaissance painting. The solution is to approach an allegorical Renaissance painting as the work of two rather than a single author: the painter, who produces the material object of aesthetic appreciation which is the sole concern of the modern viewer, and the patron peering over his shoulder, typically an ecclesiastic, who commissions the subject, including its invisible, hence irrelevant, allegorical meaning. Thus the "great questions" the paintings pose for Burckhardt are "how much was prescribed to the painter? what did he add himself? for what parts did he with difficulty gain permission? what suggestions did he reject?"<sup>50</sup> He hastens to add that these "can never be answered", yet elsewhere seems quite certain that, "left to their own powers, [the painters] would have expressed the given fundamental ideas in a far more noble and beautiful manner."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> J. Burckhardt, *The Cicerone* (London, 1873), 39.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 170, 216.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 152. Later on, in the posthumously published manuscript on the genres of Renaissance painting dating to 1885-93, Burckhardt acknowledged allegory as an integral aspect of Renaissance art, lasting throughout the period and beyond, but of course the effect of this work cannot be compared to that of *The Cicerone* and especially the *Civilization*; see J. Burckhardt, *Italian Renaissance Painting according to Genres* (Los Angeles, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> *Cicerone*, 42, 152. This was a crucial problem for Burckhardt, and he continued to discuss it in later writings. Cf. the statement, more than two decades later, in *Painting*: "Left to itself, would art ever have created allegorical figures? The question is unanswerable for there is no such thing as art 'left to itself.' No sooner does the capacity of formal creation emerge than it is summoned into the sanctuary, or to some other repository of power, there to pass the whole of its youth. There, it receives the impressions that never fade. Even at an early stage, however, both religion and power may well need to convey their nature and their demands through the abstract concept and its personification" (63). These are the first sentences in the first chapter of the *Painting* manuscript, "On Allegory", indicative of the central importance of the subject to Burckhardt's views of Renaissance art.



And here, finally, is where the dots connect, for while the formal aspect of a Renaissance painting is a genuine expression of the Renaissance *Zeitgeist*, its allegorical content is dismissed by Burckhardt as a specifically medieval atavism:

And whence we may ask arose the impulse towards this allegorising taste which pervades the whole (also the Byzantine) middle ages? It was originally a remnant of antique mythology, which Christianity had deprived of its true signification. The progenitor was Marcianus Capella, and lived in the fifth century.”<sup>52</sup>

The claim is of course erroneous, but it is hard to believe that Burckhardt was simply uninformed; more likely, he is unwilling to grapple with the consequences of the existence of an allegorical tradition long predating the advent of Christianity.<sup>53</sup> Either way, the notion of an allegory-free antiquity is essential to his purpose, for it makes it all the more plausible to erase allegory from the supposed rebirth of that antiquity, and vice versa.

The myth of the Middle Ages as the age of allegory is thus the logical outcome of the imperative to reconcile a number of factors in Burckhardt’s theory of the Renaissance: specifically, the claim that the Renaissance represents the origin of Western modernity; the primacy given to individuality and secularization in the definition of that modernity; the sharp contrast made in this respect with the culture of the Middle Ages; the aesthetic distaste for allegory as a mode of artistic representation; and finally, the cultural historian’s conviction that art, like all other aspects of a culture, is a reflection of the *Zeitgeist*. Once these claims are in place, the presence of allegory in the Renaissance becomes a problem, and the intuitive, almost inevitable solution is to relegate it to the Middle Ages. If the Middle Ages were the age of the collective, the age in which “Man was conscious of himself [...] only through some general category”, then it is only natural for that age to express itself in an art of abstractions, just as it is natural for the new age of the individual to express itself in an art of particulars.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, any presence of allegory in the Renaissance can now be explained as a residuum of the Middle Ages rather than a genuine aspect of the period.

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<sup>52</sup> *Cicerone*, 39.

<sup>53</sup> Several decades later, Burckhardt still believed, or was at any rate ready to claim, that mythological allegoresis emerges “Only at the tail end of late antiquity” (*Painting*, 67).

<sup>54</sup> *Civilization*, 87.

The model did not work as well in literary history, however, and if we now return to Burckhardt's *Civilization*, it seems clear that this explains the extremely limited treatment of imaginative literature in that book.<sup>55</sup> This might seem to imply that literature is deliberately omitted, presumably because, like art, it is a subject so extensive as to require separate treatment. Yet while Burckhardt went on to write further studies of Renaissance art and architecture, he never wrote an account of Renaissance imaginative literature. The problem, apparently, was that one could not as conveniently split the Renaissance poet in two, with the allegorist dictating to the artist. Thus Burckhardt poses the question of whether Dante was a "great poet [...] on account of his symbolism or in spite of it", and finds it impossible to answer.<sup>56</sup> In painting, the allegorical is easily divided from the non-allegorical – the "perishable and feeble" from the "immortal" – but in Dante "all is inseparably woven together; he is just as much a scholar and a theologian as a poet". Consequently, Burckhardt treats of those genres of writing, and those aspects of imaginative literature, which support the central narrative of the "discovery of the world and the discovery of man" – genres of internal and external realism: biography, autobiography, descriptions of nature – while consistently understating, and wherever possible avoiding altogether, the allegorical element in the period's literary output.

It was left to Burckhardt's successors to take up the ungrateful task of accommodating his theory to specifically literary materials, and the key role here, at least in the English context, was played by John Addington Symonds and the two literary-historical volumes of his *Renaissance in Italy*. Symonds reiterates the attribution of allegory to the Middle Ages: "The spirit of the epoch inclined to Allegory"; "the medieval theory of allegory" is the natural expression of "the medieval mind".<sup>57</sup> He goes one step further, however, by separating what Burckhardt apparently found inseparable, the allegorist and the poet, now internalized as

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<sup>55</sup> References to numerous writers are, of course, found throughout the book, yet of its forty-eight chapters, only one is specifically devoted to imaginative literature, and even this one chapter is restricted to humanist neo-Latin poetry – and is, moreover, explicitly stated not to be included for its own sake but because it "lies within the limits of our task to treat of it, at least in so far as it serves to characterize the humanistic movement" (ibid., 163).

<sup>56</sup> *Cicerone*, 38.

<sup>57</sup> J. A. Symonds, *The Renaissance in Italy: Italian Literature* (1881; repr. London, 1914), 1: 74, 80.

competing elements of a single personality. Typical in this respect is his verdict on Dante, who is said to have “stood, as a poet, at a height so far above his age and his own theories, that the cold and numbing touch of symbolism rarely mars the interest of his work”.<sup>58</sup> Finally, Symonds expands this into a general principle of literary history: many later works, even into the fifteenth century, are similarly “twy-faced”, with “one foot in the middle ages, another planted on the firm ground of the modern era”, wavering “between the psychological realism of romance and the philosophical idealism of allegory”.<sup>59</sup> Thus allegory becomes an index of a specifically literary modernity, and the progress of literature becomes measurable in degrees of its abandonment of “the allegorical heresy”, as Symonds terms it.<sup>60</sup>

With Symonds, then, the myth emerges in its fully developed literary-historical form, and all that remains is its further consolidation and dissemination. This process involves dozens of further late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century publications, and need not be fully surveyed here, yet already by 1886 an American author, James Baldwin, is able to include a section on “The Age of Allegory”, now delimited to between the twelfth and the fifteenth century, into a school textbook of English and American literature.<sup>61</sup> In Britain, the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 1: 81

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 1: 229.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 1: 82. Symonds is also the central figure in the naturalization of Burckhardt’s period concept in England, and a phrase in a diary entry of 5 April 1866 – “the English Renaissance, the Elizabethan age” – has been cited as the earliest instance of the period concept being grafted onto what seemed its obvious English analogue (see Hale, *England*, 110). Indeed, this whole entry is of interest in exemplifying the degree to which Symonds’ view of the Renaissance is a projection of his own modern condition. Not only is the Elizabethan spirit analogous to that of the Italian Renaissance, it is also analogous to that of the age immediately preceding Symonds’ own: “the two ages [...] are similar: freedom of religious thought, political freedom, a new impulse given to all speculation, the movement of the French Revolution answering to that of the Reformation”; H. F. Brown, *John Addington Symonds* (London, 1895), 1: 354-63. The Romantic poets, and even Tennyson and Browning in his own day, share a “common Elizabethanism” – remade, of course, in their own Romantic image, as non-classical, residually medieval, “Gothic”. But while the Elizabethan spirit may linger in some of its poets, the totality of nineteenth-century civilization, the *age*, could not be farther from it. The Elizabethanist thus finds himself stranded in a disenchanted world of industry, commerce, non-interventionist politics. “[T]here is no El Dorado now”, sighs the melancholy aesthete, “but California” (1: 358), and along with its fabled golden city, the golden age is poignantly and irrevocably gone. It is no surprise to find, at the end of this “diatribe”, Symonds’ confession that he wrote it in an attempt to combat an episode of that “clinging lethargy” with which he was continually plagued. It worked, and later that day he spent the afternoon “with C. among the gigantic olives, deep grass meadows, and clear streams of the Val des Oliviers pleased me. I walked in a dream. Scirocco was blowing” (1: 363) – the “Renaissance” as pastoral psychotherapy, intellectual sunbathing.

<sup>61</sup> J. Baldwin, *Essential Studies in English and American Literature* (Philadelphia, 1886). The section appears in a chapter on “Allegories”, preceding those on “The Faerie Queene” and “The Pilgrim’s Progress”, but while Spenser and Bunyan wrote allegorical works, it is only to the Middle Ages that Baldwin attributes a general taste for such literature: “From the middle of the fourteenth to the middle of the sixteenth century the taste for allegory colored almost the whole texture of literature” (136). Particularly indicative are the “Questions and Exercises” appended to each section. Thus two of the study questions for “The Age of Allegory” are “How do you account

key figure in the myth's canonization was George Saintsbury, to whose numerous distinctions is to be added that of being one of the most loquacious allegory-haters on record, with a particular flare for metaphors of emasculation and disease: allegory is "the Delilah of criticism", its Circe, its Calypso, its "congenital or endemic disease", its witch midwife, who "not too profitably assisted at the cradle of [...] literature", and will return to infest "its death-bed in her most decrepit and malignant aspect".<sup>62</sup> It is in the landmark *Periods of European Literature* series, published under Saintsbury's editorship between 1895 and 1907, that the myth takes firm British roots, especially at the hands of Saintsbury's junior colleague at Edinburgh, G. Gregory Smith, and his volume in the series, on *The Transition Period*. Building on Symonds' notion of the "two-faced" fifteenth century, Smith's book is probably the first comprehensive, large-scale deployment of the myth, consistently equating the transition from medieval to Renaissance with that from allegorical to non-allegorical literature.<sup>63</sup>

This, more or less, is how the Middle Ages became the age of allegory – and how, at the same time, the Renaissance became the age of not-allegory – a potent historiographical myth whose influence still persists, and whose most obvious and most detrimental legacy is its reinforcement of the premise of an epochal cultural divide supposed to have occurred between these two periods, and of the practices and institutions grounded on this premise. It is

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for the popularity of the allegory in the middle ages", and "Give some reasons why these old allegories have not the interest for us which they possessed for the people for whom they were written" (139). By contrast, the questions on *The Faerie Queene* almost entirely bypass such issues: instead, pupils are to be asked "What peculiarities of character distinguish such men as Raleigh, Drake, Sidney, and Captain John Smith", and whether they think "Spenser had such men as these in mind when describing his ideal knights" (144). Cf. *The Famous Allegories*, ed. J. Baldwin (New York, 1893); this appeared as the second volume in a series of "Select English Classics". The selection extends from *Piers Plowman* to Samuel Johnson, yet again the Middle Ages are singled out: "From the twelfth to the fifteenth century was the age of vision and mystery. Hence it was preëminently the age of allegory" (16).

<sup>62</sup> G. Saintsbury, *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe* (Edinburgh, 1900-04), 1: 67-8, 187, 393.

<sup>63</sup> G. G. Smith, *The Transition Period* (Edinburgh, 1900): the *Grands Rhétoriciens* "outdid the earlier writers of the century in excessive allegory", but rather than a tendency of their own period they "really" represent "the dying protest of literary feudalism" (115); in Italy, "allegory is attacked by the realism which Boccaccio had imposed on the symbolism of Dante and on the more direct fervours of Petrarch" (122); Boiardo's avoidance of allegory is indicative of the prevalence of "the spirit of the Renaissance" over the lingering remnants of "mediævalism" (142); periods in the "history of poetry" are at one point given as "allegorical, Elizabethan, Augustan, Pre-Raphaelite" (323); "As an allegory of the most persistent and involved kind", the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* is said to be "essentially medieval [...]; but in spirit, in its eclecticism, its lustiness, its luxuriousness, there beats the pulse of the New Age" (394-5). The most frequently cited authority is Symonds (126 *et passim*).

no coincidence that scholars concerned specifically with the allegorical tradition have repeatedly found themselves driven to question the validity of the accepted periodisational concepts and boundaries. Allegory confounds periodisation because periodisation confounds allegory.

“And here I do not use ‘myth’ in any technical sense”, wrote James Franklin in one the more spirited attacks on the concept of the Renaissance, “as some *avant garde* theologians are said to do, according to which a myth may be in some way essentially true. By ‘myth’ I mean ‘lie.’”<sup>64</sup> Admittedly, the Age of Allegory is, in the final analysis, a lie, long overdue to join the Flat Earth, the Chastity Belt, the Angels Dancing on the Head of a Pin, and other denizens of that strange limbo of exploded scholarly prejudices about the nature of European civilization between the fall of Rome and the fall of Constantinople. Admittedly, none of the various rationales proposed for the myth is ultimately convincing.<sup>65</sup> Yet it is also a myth in a sense not unlike – of course, not quite the same either – as that of the theologians, and its appeal is the appeal of all myths: it transforms a hostile chaos into a hospitable cosmos, conferring on the sprawling wastes of the literary past a historical shape, and endowing it with teleological motion. It must have felt good to be Borges, and to be able to date the emergence of modern literature, not to a century, or even a decade, but the very year. It must have fulfilled, this incessantly repeated sacrifice of allegory at the altar of literary modernity, some deeply ingrained intellectual and even emotional need. Thus if any particular product of this need may be safely discarded, the need itself must be taken seriously, and subjected to elaborate scrutiny, especially in the light of its most recent manifestation, the so-called “return of allegory” in the latter half of twentieth century, a turn of events which Borges would have found laughably impossible in 1949, and which he, mercifully, did not live to witness.

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<sup>64</sup> J. Franklin, “The Renaissance Myth”, *Quadrant* 26 (1982): 51-60; I quote from the online version at <http://web.maths.unsw.edu.au/~jim/renaissance.html>.

<sup>65</sup> These have included, in Kelley’s useful summary, “the replacement of Platonic ‘realism’ by the nominalist conviction that ‘Truth’ and ‘Justice’ are names, not ideal universals; a sharp decline in literary allusions to myth and biblical typology; the dissolution of the system of aristocratic patronage which had supplied learned readers who knew how to read arcane allegories and emblems; the Protestant and Puritan animus against complex or learned emblems and allegorical interpretations of the Bible; and arguments in favor of verisimilitude and a ‘plain style.’ Under the collective pressure of these cultural shifts, it has been claimed, allegory is forced out by the standard-bearers of modernity: empiricism, historiography, realism (in the modern sense), and plain, rational speech” (*Reinventing Allegory*, 1-2).

#### IV

“For all of us, allegory is an aesthetic mistake.” A year before Borges wrote these words, however, Curtius’ great book had already been published, containing, among its inexhaustible riches, a digression on the curious resurgence of allegory the author had observed in the work of Balzac. In “messianically and apocalyptically excited periods”, he writes, “faded symbolic figures can be filled with new life, like shades which have drunk blood”.<sup>66</sup> This was to prove prescient, and in fact, even before Curtius, the shade had already been drinking for some decades. By April 1925, Walter Benjamin completed his ill-fated *Habilitationsschrift* on the tragic drama – or *Trauerspiel*, “mourning play” – of the German baroque, which ended with a chapter on “Allegory and Trauerspiel”. Here, in an argument informed more decisively by contemporary polemical concerns, and Benjamin’s own idiosyncratically appreciative experience of the allegorical and emblematic art and literature of the seventeenth century, than any attempt to arrive at an objective literary-historical estimate of the subject, he mounts a campaign against the Romantic concept of the “symbol”, and for the rehabilitation of its scorned counterpart, that would eventually exercise a profound influence on the aesthetics and literary criticism of the later twentieth century.

“For over a hundred years”, charges the opening sentence, “the philosophy of art has been subject to the tyranny of a usurper who came to power in the chaos which followed in the wake of romanticism” – namely, the symbol, or rather the “illegitimate”, “distorted”, and “destructive” “abuse” of that term, to be carefully distinguished from its “genuine” meaning, “which is the one used in the field of theology”, and which “could never have shed that sentimental twilight over the philosophy of beauty which has become more and more impenetrable since the end of early romanticism”.<sup>67</sup> The “excessively logical” opposition of “symbol” to “allegory” reduced the latter “to the dark background against which the bright world of the symbol might stand out”.<sup>68</sup> By contrast, Benjamin seeks – and this is, in his own

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<sup>66</sup> E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* [1948] (1953; repr. New York, 1990), 104.

<sup>67</sup> W. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [1928] (1998; repr. London, 2003), 159-61.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

words, the “*experimentum crucis*” of his thesis<sup>69</sup> – to restore an understanding of allegory which is not only less mechanical, and where allegory emerges as “not just a playful illustrative technique, but a form of expression” in its own right, but is accorded an immense and almost mystical significance, far transcending the sphere of German baroque drama, or even art and literature as such:

Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face – or rather in a death’s head. And although such a thing lacks all “symbolic” freedom of expression, all classical proportion, all humanity – nevertheless, this is the form in which man’s subjection to nature is most obvious and it significantly gives rise not only to the enigmatic question of the nature of human existence as such, but also of the biographical historicity of the individual. This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular explanation of history as the Passion of the world; its importance resides solely in the stations of its decline. The greater the significance, the greater the subjection to death, because death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical nature and significance. But if nature has always been subject to the power of death, it is also true that it has always been allegorical.<sup>70</sup>

If one is no longer puzzled by encountering such a passage in an academic discussion of allegory, it is only because Benjamin’s work has been so exceptionally influential over the past several decades, and more broadly, because the discourse of the *Origin* resonates so profoundly with that of late twentieth-century literary theory, which restored Benjamin’s work from obscurity and elevated him to the status of one of key twentieth-century thinkers.

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. the letter to G. Scholem of 22 Dec 1924, discussing the *Origin*, which is nearing completion: “Yet I dare not predict with complete assurance whether ‘allegory’ – the entity that was my primary concern to recover – will momentarily burst forth from the whole in its totality, as it were”; *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, ed. G. Scholem and T. W. Adorno (Chicago, 1994), 256. Another letter to Scholem, from 19 Feb 1925, describes the work as a “quest of the golden fleece of baroque allegory” (ibid., 260).

<sup>70</sup> Benjamin, *Origin*, 161.

In 1925, however, passages like these cost Benjamin an academic career – perhaps even, some have suggested, his life. The thesis was found to be incomprehensible – “Geist kann man nicht habilitieren” was the verdict, as reported by Scholem – and Benjamin was advised to withdraw his application to save himself the embarrassment of a formal rejection. His later overtures to the Warburg circle also proved futile; an extract from the *Origin* was read by Panofsky, whose response was “cool” and “resentment-laden”.<sup>71</sup> Although printed in 1928, the book did not attract much attention, and soon passed into near-oblivion. Europe plunged into another World War, and its troubled author took his life during an attempt to flee the Nazi occupation of France in September 1940. Reduced to a shade, this strange intellectual fruit of the apocalyptically excited Weimar epoch did not, however, die; forgotten and emaciated, it waited, precisely according to Curtius’ prediction, for an infusion of fresh blood.

Although I return to Benjamin, among others, in the Afterword, it is perhaps worth emphasizing at this point that the present study is not “Benjaminian” in perspective, nor attempts a comprehensive critical engagement with his work on allegory, and the extensive work on this work.<sup>72</sup> What is important to acknowledge, however, is the key role it played in what has been widely recognized as the “reemergence”, “reinvention”, “resurgence”, “reevaluation”, “revival”, “rehabilitation”, “return”, etc., of allegory in the late twentieth century.<sup>73</sup> In 1955 the *Origin* was republished in a two-volume edition of Benjamin’s works edited by Theodor Adorno, soon followed by other editions. Hans-Georg Gadamer was an early reader, and his *Truth and Method* included a Benjamin-derived critique of the symbol-allegory opposition, entitled “The Limits of *Erlebniskunst* and the Rehabilitation of

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<sup>71</sup> Benjamin, *Correspondence*, 324. Cf. M. Rampley, *The Remembrance of Things Past* (Wiesbaden, 2000), 11-12.

<sup>72</sup> Two recent reappraisals are H. Caygill, “Walter Benjamin’s Concept of Allegory”, in *Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Copeland and Struck, and B. Hoxby, “The Function of Allegory in Baroque Tragic Drama”, in *Allegory*, ed. Machosky.

<sup>73</sup> See, respectively, S. Melville, “Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory”, *October* 19 (1981): 55-92; Kelley, *Reinventing Allegory*, 17, 204, 278; G. Day, “Allegory: Between Deconstruction and Dialectics”, *Oxford Art Journal* 22 (1999): 105-118, p. 1; K. Borris, *Allegory and Epic in English Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, 2000), 14; R. Nägele, “Constructions of Allegory”, in *Allegory and Interpretation*, ed. Whitman, 451.



Allegory”.<sup>74</sup> Paul de Man read both Benjamin and Gadamer, and in his 1969 essay “The Rhetoric of Temporality” the critique of the Romantic-modernist aesthetic of the symbol, and the corresponding rehabilitation of allegory as a positive term in critical discourse, made its first major impact in the Anglophone academia, followed, in the 1970s, by the translations of Benjamin and Gadamer, and de Man’s *Allegories of Reading*.<sup>75</sup> By the 1980s, talk of a return of allegory becomes widespread, and the term retains a currency, especially in art history and literary studies, to this day.

At the same time, a more critical appraisal of this development has largely failed to take place, which is perhaps even more curious and disconcerting than the development itself. This, as already noted above, and as one sensitive commentator suggested very early on, would seem to be due to the lack of historical perspective:

Allegory has come to appear to us as “the trope of tropes” – and my concern is then with who we are now and what it means to find ourselves before this appearance.

Allegory has come to appear to us as the trope of tropes – and this should be astonishing. What we are inclined to forget is that for most of us allegory has been – where it has been anything at all – a term of denigration, a way of naming the merely rhetorical: the brute fact of constraint to ornament, convention, artifice – opposed variously to the depth and integrity, spontaneity and organic holism, of metaphor and symbol.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [1960], 2nd rev. ed. (2004; repr. 2006), 61-70. Benjamin is not mentioned in the discussion itself, but the debt is explicitly acknowledged in the second-edition Foreword: “The vindication of allegory, which is pertinent here, began some years ago with Walter Benjamin’s major work, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*” (xxxvi, n. 8).

<sup>75</sup> See P. de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality” [1969], in *Blindness and Insight*, 2nd rev. ed. (Minneapolis, 1983); *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, 1979). De Man cites Benjamin and Gadamer in “Rhetoric”, 187-91. For an investigation into Benjamin’s influence on de Man, see A. Mirabile, “Allegory, Pathos, and Irony”, *German Studies Review* 35 (2012): 319-333. As with Benjamin, the work proceeding from de Man’s reconceptualization of “allegory” is too extensive to be surveyed here.

<sup>76</sup> Melville, “Notes”, 57. The quote is from J. Fineman, “Structure of Allegorical Desire”, *October* 12 (1980): 44-6. “Theoretical discussions of allegory”, writes Fineman, “regularly begin by lamenting the breadth of the term and relating its compass to the habit of mind that, as it is irritatedly put, sees allegory everywhere. Thus generalized, allegory rapidly acquires the status of trope of tropes, representative of the figurality of all language, the distance between signifier and signified, and, correlatively, the response to allegory becomes representative of critical activity per se” (48). Melville is responding to Fineman’s, Owens’ (see n. 79), and several other early articles raising the question of the rehabilitation of allegory published in the journal *October* in 1979-80, and well worth rereading from the present perspective.

At the same time, it is clear that, even as it reversed the values embedded in the traditional decline-of-allegory narrative, and added a further episode to it, this postmodern rehabilitation of allegory did not really alter its basic structure.<sup>77</sup> The sequence allegorical-antiallegorical-neoallegorical obviously still runs parallel to that of premodern-modern-postmodern, raising additional questions that would not have been possible just three decades ago.

To ask Borges' question today thus means to ask it from a perspective where the anti-allegorical aesthetics he espoused can no longer be taken for granted, and has itself become an episode in the allegorical tradition, rather than its end. Where it was once sufficient to ask why allegory used to be thought enchanting and then became intolerable, today this question inevitably extends into its opposite – how is it that allegory was once thought so intolerable, but is now again, at least in some circles, enchanting? Is it merely coincidental that this return of allegory is coterminous with the onset of the notions of postmodernity and postmodernism? How does this affect our view of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, the most intensely contested period – apart from our own, that is – in the history of the allegorical tradition? Perhaps we have not, in spite of all the apocalyptic and messianic excitement of the recent decades, “reentered an allegorical age”, but perhaps we do find ourselves suitably positioned to reappraise the place of allegory in former ages, and especially the one in which, ostensibly, lie the origins of our own (post)modernity.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> As noted, for example, by E. D. Hirsch, Jr., “Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory”, *New Literary History* 25 (1994): 549-67: “Paul de Man [...] asserted not long ago that allegory is *aesthetically* superior to symbolism, but he did so as a reversal of received views” (551). This is also why Quilligan could not escape seeing the neoallegorical tendencies of the postmodern as curiously neomedieval: “The twentieth century is little like the Middle Ages, which will no doubt remain the great age of allegorical narrative [...]. But we must also realize that the whirligig of time has brought in some strange resemblances, and that we are in a peculiar position to understand the medieval concern for the way language structures the world; we can now sense its affinities for our own concerns”; M. Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory* (Ithaca, 1979), 279. This perspective inevitably arises from the position of contesting the traditional decline-of-allegory narrative on its own terms: the entry into postmodernity must reveal itself as a *reentry* into premodernity.

<sup>78</sup> See Quilligan, *Language*, 155: “we seem to have in the last quarter of the twentieth century to have reentered an allegorical age”. A year later, the revival of allegory is explicitly equated with the notion of postmodernism in an influential essay by the art historian C. Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism”, *October* 12 (1980): 67-86, 13 (1980): 58-80.

Finally, a few disclaimers. In touching on a number of subjects which are rarely discussed in the same context, a study like this one inevitably involves compromises. For one thing, the extent of the problems presented by the notion of modernity is of the same, if not greater magnitude than of those presented by the notion of allegory. With a good deal of simplification, it could perhaps be said that allegory is one thing with many names, while modernity is one name attached to a great many things. One parameter here is scale: to a paleoanthropologist, “modern” means having the anatomy of *homo sapiens* – as, for instance, in the British Museum’s 2013 exhibition *Ice Age Art: Arrival of the Modern Mind*, featuring art dating from 40,000 to 10,000 years ago – whereas it means something quite different to the editor of a fashion magazine. Even within the same time-scale, however, there is the question of focus: modernity will manifest itself very differently depending on where one goes looking for it, or lack of it – religion, science and technology, politics, economics, or, as is mostly the case in the present study, art and imaginative literature. Even among literary scholars working in the same period there will be disagreement as to what constitutes (or detracts from) that period’s modernity (or lack thereof), and at a certain level of specialization *proto-, pre-, post-, early, late, classic, high, long, unfinished* and other high-resolution modernities will also begin to proliferate.

Needless to say, this thesis is no exception. If anything, defining modernity in the present context is especially problematic due to the fact that allegory has itself often been involved, at the fundamental level, in the formation of historiographical concepts and frameworks inscribed with those very teleologies of modernity that one sets out to investigate. Hence the frequent recourse to formulations like “the allegory-modernity problem”, “the allegory-modernity dynamics”, “the allegory-modernity nexus”, and so forth – the point is precisely to indicate the interdependence of the two categories, and the need of acknowledging this interdependence in any study of the subject that hopes not to repeat the errors already inscribed in much of the traditional terminology. Broadly speaking, however,

this thesis is mainly concerned with aesthetic modernity, meaning chiefly the belief that art and imaginative literature constitute an autonomous domain of human endeavour, proximate and related to, but still categorically distinct from such neighbouring domains as philosophy, rhetoric, or history. Within this general purview, emphasis varies from chapter to chapter: Chapter 1 tackles this notion at the most direct and abstract level, looking at sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors' own explicit theoretical statements on the subject; in Chapter 2, the question manifests itself largely as that of the representation in art and imaginative literature, here notably the drama, of the modern qualities of individuality and subjectivity; and in Chapter 3, the focus is on aspects of what is often problematically referred to as "secularization", and ultimately, on aspects of seventeenth-century ontology and epistemology. Of course, the long answer to the question of what is meant by modernity in this study is in the chapters themselves, and it is hoped that this summary will be illuminated by the close engagements with particular sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts and traditions in the pages that follow.

A compromise also has to be made between the general and the particular. Anyone who has worked on the subject will know that the temptation to overtheorize is always lurking. Time and time again, it has been felt that the phenomenon of allegory holds the key to some of the great questions of intellectual history, if not the human condition itself. At the same time, there is also the more common temptation to undertheorize, to delay the verdict until all the evidence is in, to wait for the facts to speak for themselves. For a while now, the present author has found it amusing to imagine this dialectic in terms of a morally neutralized psychomachia in which his academic soul is fought over by daemonic figures emblematic of these two temptations. One the one side, standing for the temptation to overtheorize, is thus Northrop Frye. Frye's section on allegory in *Anatomy of Criticism* is of course an essential contribution to the subject, and its treatment of allegory as a universal literary mode, manifesting itself as a spectrum of possibilities in any historical period – "a kind of sliding scale, ranging from the most explicitly allegorical [literature], consistent with being literature at all, at one extreme, to the most elusive, anti-explicit and anti-allegorical at the other" – is a

major, perhaps even the decisive impetus behind the emergence of modern allegory studies.<sup>79</sup> It is also, however, a paradigmatic example – notably in the much quoted statement that “all commentary is allegorical interpretation” – of the temptation to overtheorize.<sup>80</sup> Less well known, but even more symptomatic in this respect is the book’s preface – not the famous “Polemical Introduction”, but the brief “Prefatory Statements and Acknowledgments” which precede it – where Frye explains its genesis as the by-product of an attempt to produce a comprehensive “theory of allegory”: “I [...] began a study of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, only to discover that in my beginning was my end. The Introduction to Spenser became an introduction to the theory of allegory, and that theory obstinately adhered to a much larger theoretical structure.”<sup>81</sup>

On the other side, standing for the temptation to undertheorize, is the unjustly less familiar figure of Don Cameron Allen, on whom this dubious honour is conferred due to a passage in his invaluable 1970 study *Mysteriously Meant: The Rediscovery of Pagan Symbolism and Allegorical Interpretation in the Renaissance*, one of more than twenty books, in addition to over one hundred articles, published by this major Renaissance scholar, who taught for forty years at Johns Hopkins, and who, to quote from an official biographical note, “knew not only Latin, Greek, Hebrew and French, but was an expert in the entire range of Renaissance learning from astrology to scriptural exegesis”. That this is indeed so becomes instantly clear to anyone who opens *Mysteriously Meant*, a product of a lifetime of devoted and highly competent scholarship. Having read, however, more or less everything that one can be humanly expected to have read about allegory in the Renaissance, and produced what he himself describes as “an annotated bibliography or a thinly masked *Grundriss*” of the subject, here is what Allen had to say about the broader implications of his study: “I have presented the facts as I got them – the hard way. I have no theories to offer although I have

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<sup>79</sup> N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957; repr. Princeton, 1990), 91. In his *Allegory*, Fletcher identifies E. Honig’s *Dark Conceit* (1959; repr. New York, 1966), as “to my knowledge the pioneering work on the subject in modern times” (12). Turning to Honig’s Preface, we find him acknowledging a debt to Frye, “whose personal reassurances and Promethean labours in all areas of literary criticism confirmed my sense of the shape which the book had to take” (ix).

<sup>80</sup> Frye, *Anatomy*, 89.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

read many of the moderns who have speculated about myth and symbol. Since I am without thought I do not need interpretation. Endurance is all that is required.”<sup>82</sup>

These, then, are the two impasses that I have sought to avoid: having no thoughts, and having too many thoughts. Without a theory, the accumulation of facts can go on indefinitely, endurance permitting. But more importantly, there is simply no such thing as a book without a theory, and the more one pretends otherwise, the more is one likely to fall back on the seemingly most neutral, but in reality only the most traditional, and hence most dangerous, of theories. Withdrawal into empiricist ascesis will not keep the Fryean demon at bay. Yet to surrender to the demon unconditionally, especially with such a subject as allegory, is to let thought cave in on itself – suddenly allegory is everywhere, and everything is somehow allegorical, and before one knows it, one is writing the new *Anatomy of Criticism*. It is hoped that the thesis strikes a good balance, and that there are enough thoughts in it to illuminate the facts, and enough facts to harness the thoughts.

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<sup>82</sup> D. C. Allen, *Mysteriously Meant* (Baltimore, 1970), x.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**ALLEGORY AND POETICS**

I conjure you all [...] to believe, with Clauserus, the translator of Cornutus, that it pleased the heavenly deity, by Hesiod and Homer, under the veil of fables, to give us all knowledge, logic, rhetoric, philosophy natural and moral, and *quid non?*; to believe, with me, that there are many mysteries contained in poetry, which of purpose were written darkly, lest by profane wits it should be abused [...].  
 – P. Sidney, c.1580<sup>1</sup>

Do you believe upon your conscience, that *Homer* whil'st he was couching his *Iliads* and *Odysses*, had any thought upon those Allegories, which *Plutarch*, *Heraclides*, *Ponticus*, *Fristatius*, *Cornutus* squeezed out of him, and which *Politian* filched againe from them: if you trust it, with neither hand nor foot do you come neare to my opinion, which judgeth them to have been as little dreamed of by *Homer*, as the Gospel-sacraments were by *Ovid* in his *Metamorphosis*, though a certaine gulligut Fryer and true bacon-picker, would have undertaken to prove it, if perhaps he had met with as very fools as himself (and as the Proverb saies) *a lid worthy of such a kettle*.

– F. Rabelais, c.1532-34<sup>2</sup>

A study of what sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors thought about allegory does well to begin with what these authors said they thought about allegory. In addition to providing one with a place to start and a reference point against which to gauge other, less tangible, evidence on the subject, explicit statements are of intrinsic interest for the light they shed on how their authors arranged their intellectual spheres, and where literature in general, and the allegorical conception of literature in particular, fitted into these arrangements. As the ensuing pages will show, allegory is not one issue among many, and when writers of the period voice opinions on the subject, they voice in miniature whole theories of literature, or at least of

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<sup>1</sup> P. Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. K. Duncan-Jones and J. Van Dorsten (Oxford, 1973), 121. The first of Sidney's appeals renders a passage from Clauserus' preface to his translation of Cornutus' *Compendium* (Basel, 1543), a3r, as first noted in Shuckburg's edition (Cambridge, 1891).

<sup>2</sup> F. Rabelais, *Gargantua, And his Sonne Pantagruel* [c.1532-34] (London, 1653), B3r-v. "*Heraclides*, *Ponticus*" is one person, the Heraclitus (sometimes dubbed Ponticus) of the *Homeric Problems*; "*Fristatius*" is the Homeric commentator Eustathius.



particular literary genres. Even their silence is meaningful – in fact, silence may well be especially meaningful. Although they do so far more often than has usually been acknowledged, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century critics do not always explicitly endorse an allegorical view of literature. Exceedingly rare, however, are occasions on which they explicitly denounce it, and even when they do, it is not always for reasons modern readers might expect, and with which they can easily sympathize. Too often has a critic's silence on this question been taken as evidence of dissent from the allegorical tradition. Given the striking scarcity of explicit anti-allegorical statements in the period, it often makes just as much sense to interpret this silence as tacit consent to a doctrine so commonplace that a writer may not have felt it to require special mention. In any case, explicit references to allegory in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetics provide us with our most direct point of entry into the subject, and it seems worth our while to give them a hearing.

Furthermore, scholarship on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetics is itself so thoroughly permeated by the allegory-modernity problem that it is in itself of interest to our discussion, offering an exceptionally clear example of what is at stake in the matter, and how it has affected one particular tradition of modern scholarly inquiry. As even a cursory review of this scholarship will show, from the formative study of Joel Elias Spingarn to the present day, most major accounts of English Renaissance poetics have, to a greater or lesser degree, been Burckhardtian narratives of the (supposed) aesthetic modernity of the Renaissance breaking away from, and ultimately triumphing over, the (supposed) aesthetic premodernity of the Middle Ages. In Spingarn's words, "the criteria by which imaginative literature was judged during the Middle Ages were not literary criteria", and when it was not "disregarded or contemned", "it was as the handmaiden of philosophy, and most of all as the vassal of theology, that poetry was chiefly valued".<sup>3</sup> By contrast, the task of Renaissance poetics is to lead poetry out of this lamentable captivity, "to re-establish the aesthetic foundations of literature, to reaffirm the eternal lesson of Hellenic culture, and to restore once and for all the

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<sup>3</sup> J. E. Spingarn, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* (New York, 1899), 3.

element of beauty to its rightful place in human life and in the world of art”.<sup>4</sup> In a word, Renaissance poetics is modern, and indeed that word is often found on Spingarn’s lips as he pursues his pioneering task of recounting how “modern criticism began”.<sup>5</sup>

## SPECTRES OF SPINGARN

This view has not gone wholly uncontested, but a careful analysis of the major studies and anthologies shows that Spingarn’s paradigm has continued to dominate the scholarship on the subject. Consequently, most historians of English Renaissance poetics – although, again, not always to the same degree, nor with the same emphasis – have significantly understated and misrepresented the role played by the allegorical conception of literature in the attempts of the period’s critics to answer the fundamental theoretical questions of what poetry is, to which sphere of human endeavour it belongs, what purpose it serves, and so forth. According to this traditional view, nothing could be more characteristic of the literary sensibility of the Middle Ages, or more incompatible with that of the Renaissance. If the Middle Ages regarded poetry as a vassal of philosophy and theology, allegory is the very means by which this vassalage was exacted: “while perhaps justifying poetry from the standpoint of ethics and divinity, [allegory] gives it no place as an independent art; thus considered, poetry becomes merely a popularized form of theology”.<sup>6</sup> At the same time as it is relegated to the Middle Ages, allegory’s presence in Renaissance poetics is suppressed by means of a number of characteristic evasive manoeuvres, some combination of which is encountered in most subsequent treatments of the subject. These have included temporal and conceptual displacement (in order to make it free of allegory, the Renaissance is redefined and/or chronologically repositioned), exclusion (texts or parts of texts advocating the allegorical approach to literature are omitted from studies and anthologies), understatement (appeals of Renaissance critics to the allegorical doctrine are acknowledged, but are presented as an

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., v.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 8.

inessential and increasingly irrelevant element in their arguments), and relativisation (Renaissance critics do appeal to allegory, but they do not really mean it, or the allegory to which they appeal is not the same kind as that of the Middle Ages, or their theoretical statements are found to be contradicted by their own literary practice, and so on).

Whichever of these tactics they employ, most accounts of the rise of Renaissance criticism inevitably turn into accounts of the decline of allegory, and just as inevitably, they do not proceed very far before running into major conceptual and chronological obstacles. A cultural historian like Burckhardt could afford to be highly selective in his treatment of the literature and literary criticism of the period and could thus get away with greatly under-representing the extent to which it is imbued by allegory. A literary historian like Symonds already finds “the allegorical heresy” much more widespread and difficult to account for, but can still evade it by orthodox interpretations of the literary practice, as opposed to the stubbornly heretical theory, of the age.<sup>7</sup> No such escape route is open to the historian of poetics, however, who is focused precisely on what the age preached rather than what it actually practiced. Thus immediately after having described it as the quintessential reflection of the medieval hostility towards imaginative literature, Spingarn must concede that allegory was not only essential to the poetical views of early humanists like Petrarch and Boccaccio, but that it “did indeed continue throughout the Renaissance”, that “This theory of poetic art, one of the commonplaces of the age, may be described as the great legacy of the Middle Ages to Renaissance criticism” – and, with special reference to the English tradition, that it is allegory which, “more than anything else, colored critical theory in Elizabethan England”.<sup>8</sup> Thus the historian of poetics finds himself torn between two irreconcilable variables, seeking to affirm a modernity for Renaissance criticism in terms fundamentally incompatible with the

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<sup>7</sup> Even though “The contemporary theory of aesthetics demanded allegory”, the poet knows better than the theorist, and “No metaphysical sophistication, no allegory, no scholastic mysticism, can [...] cloud a poet’s vision” (*Italian Literature*, 1: 54). See Introduction, pp. 32-3, on Symonds’ estimate of Dante. Boccaccio is similarly said to have “repeated current theories about [...] the dignity of allegory”, yet “his own work showed how little he had appropriated these ideas” (1: 81-7). Burckhardt’s influence is particularly palpable here. Compare Symonds’ estimates of Dante and Boccaccio to those in Burckhardt’s *Cicerone* (1: 40) and *Civilization* (1: 165): “The poetical value” of Dante’s work “rests entirely on the lofty artistic representation of single motives”, whereas its “symbolic meaning [...] is only valuable as literature and history, not as poetry”; Boccaccio “boldly set” the example for the use of pagan deities in Renaissance poetry, namely to “replace abstract terms [...], and render allegorical figures superfluous”.

<sup>8</sup> *History*, 9, 261-2.

doctrine of allegory, while at the same time acknowledging that this doctrine was “almost universally accepted by Renaissance writers”.<sup>9</sup> But how can Renaissance poetics stay modern while almost universally accepting a doctrine defined as the very essence of poetical premodernity? The answer, of course, is that it cannot, at least not without major concessions in the customary understanding of the “Renaissance”.

Consequently, as his study progresses, Spingarn finds himself cornered into abandoning the lofty criteria of aesthetic modernity announced in its opening sentences for a more modest cause of classicist “rationalism”, and consequently into pushing “Renaissance” poetics forward in time to the recovery and dissemination of Aristotle’s *Poetics*.<sup>10</sup> Only with the *Poetics* does it become possible to defend literature – the “justification of imaginative literature” being the “first” and “fundamental” concern of Renaissance criticism – on aesthetic rather than moral grounds, and thus without recourse to the doctrine of allegory.<sup>11</sup> But the *Poetics* only lays “the foundation of modern criticism”, which does not reach maturity until it replaces the rule of an authority, even if that authority is Aristotle, with the rule of “reason”.<sup>12</sup> Here Spingarn’s account of Renaissance literary criticism can finally link up with the larger narrative of the Renaissance as codified by Burckhardt and Englished by Symonds, for this rationalist classicism can now be presented as a facet of that same “liberation of human reason” which resulted in “the growth of the sciences and arts, and in the reaction against mediæval sacerdotalism and dogma”.<sup>13</sup> The final touch comes with the declaration that Italian criticism contains “the germs of romantic as well as classical criticism”, and the integration of this “romantic” element – which basically amounts to the Neoplatonic defence of the poetic

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>10</sup> Hence the subtitle: *with Special Reference to the Influence of Italy in the Formation and Development of Modern Classicism*.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 3. See esp. the discussion in the book’s first chapter. Spingarn also employs the other manoeuvres: for example, while he notes that Petrarch and Boccaccio both “regarded allegory as the warp and woof of poetry”, he adds that “they modified the mediæval point of view [that saw poetry as a form of theology] by arguing conversely that theology itself is a form of poetry, – the poetry of God” (8); “in employing the old method”, the Quattrocento humanists are likewise said to have “carried it far beyond its original application” by admiring the literal sense of the pagan poetry even as they attended to its allegorical meanings (10). To what degree these views depart from those of the preceding period is debatable: for the view that early humanist poetics was actually a continuation of a number of trends in medieval poetics, see C. C. Greenfield, *Humanist and Scholastic Poetics* (Lewisburg, 1981); for further discussion of Greenfield’s study, see below, pp. 63-6.

<sup>12</sup> Spingarn, *History*, 145.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 148.

imagination, minus its allegorical corollary – into the “classicist” thesis: “according as the reason or the imagination predominates in Renaissance literature, there results neo-classicism or romanticism, while the most perfect art finds a reconciliation of both elements in the imaginative reason”.<sup>14</sup> It is in this sense, and only in this sense, that Spingarn can at last say that “the theory of poetry, as enunciated by the Italians of the sixteenth century, has not diminished in value, but has continued to pervade the finer minds of men from that time to this”.<sup>15</sup>

Spingarn’s argument grows increasingly complex as his study progresses, yet the logic behind it is so simple that it can be reduced to two syllogisms, with the conclusion of the first providing the first premise of the second: one, Renaissance poetics is modern – allegory is not modern – therefore, Renaissance poetics is not allegorical; and two, Renaissance poetics is not allegorical – non-allegorical poetics becomes possible only with the recovery of Aristotle’s *Poetics* – therefore, Renaissance poetics becomes possible only with the recovery of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. In the end, we do get a “Renaissance” poetics superficially purged of allegory, but at what cost? Spingarn must sacrifice not only Petrarch and Boccaccio, but the entire Quattrocento as well, the heart of the Italian Renaissance as commonly understood by cultural and literary history alike, and even the early decades of the Cinquecento. As he himself notes, the earliest Italian editions of the *Poetics*, Giorgio Valla’s Latin translation of 1498 and the 1508 Greek text in the Aldine *Rhetores Graeci*, had “scarcely any immediate influence on literary criticism”.<sup>16</sup> Thus the beginning of Renaissance literary criticism must be postponed until Pazzi’s edition of 1536, for only “from this time, the influence of the Aristotelian canons becomes manifest in critical literature”. But again, this is only the foundation, for there remains the further step of replacing the authority of Aristotle with the authority of reason. Spingarn cites the appeal in the 1587 *Discorso* of Jason Denores to “reason and Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which is indeed founded on naught save reason”, and then adds: “This is as far as Italian criticism ever went. It was the function of neo-classicism in

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 17.

France, as will be seen, to show that such a phrase as ‘reason *and* Aristotle’ is a contradiction in itself, that the Aristotelian canons and reason are ultimately reducible to the same thing”.<sup>17</sup>

The process has to be completed by Boileau, whose strictures against the use of Christian themes are taken to be the culmination of that “combined effect of humanism, essentially pagan, and rationalism, essentially sceptical”, that produced the “irreligious character of neo-classic art”.<sup>18</sup> The year is 1674. The unspoken burden of Spingarn’s thesis – elimination of allegory by any means necessary – has argued its stated subject, a history of Renaissance literary criticism, out of existence.

Now, while the Italian chapter required this brutal and messy amputation, and while the French was saved only by a most ironically un-Aristotelian intervention of a *deus ex machina*,<sup>19</sup> in the English the analogous result could be achieved almost effortlessly, for unlike the Italian or the French, the English dynastic periodisation, with its long-established view of the reign of Elizabeth I as “the greatest period of the greatest literature of the world”, was uniquely suited to the task.<sup>20</sup> A foreign and still fairly novel concept in Anglophone literary studies of Spingarn’s day, the Renaissance was naturally assimilated to its apparent native analogue, the Elizabethan Age.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, previous work on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English criticism had already traced the outlines of the “Elizabethan”

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>19</sup> The narrative stumbles in the French chapter, when it proves impossible to find any Aristotelian influence on French criticism before the final third of the sixteenth century, and full-blown classicist doctrine before the beginning of the seventeenth – “Excepting, of course, Scaliger”, an Italian, and even then “it was not until the very end of the century that he held the dictatorial position afterward accorded to him” (ibid., 184-9). “[T]here was, one might almost say, little critical theorizing in the French Renaissance.” To be sure, there was plenty of allegory, exemplified by a generous extract from Ronsard (193), but that is of no use. Yet what is one to conclude – that French Renaissance criticism does not begin until some decades after the emergence of the Pléiade, or worse still, until the seventeenth century? The only solution is to loosen the Aristotelian criterion and present the beginning of French Renaissance criticism as the singlehanded achievement of Du Bellay’s *Defence and Illustration of the French Language*: “In no other country of Europe is the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance so clearly marked as it is in France by this single book” (171). Yet the *Defence* meets the Aristotelian criterion only in the most superficial manner, by virtue of containing the first reference to the *Poetics* in French criticism; Spingarn himself tells us that it displays “no evidence whatsoever” of direct acquaintance with Aristotle’s treatise, “of whose contents [Du Bellay] knew little or nothing” (184). Elsewhere, we read on the same page (177) that the *Defence* marks the beginning of “modern criticism in France”, and that it is “not in any true sense a work of literary criticism at all”.

<sup>20</sup> G. Saintsbury, *A History of Elizabethan Literature* (London, 1887), vii.

<sup>21</sup> See Introduction, n. 60.

canon, reaching no further back than Gascoigne, while at the same time pushing forward at least up to Milton.<sup>22</sup>

Thus Spingarn had ample precedent in equating, in the opening sentence of his English chapter, “Renaissance” with “Elizabethan” criticism, for delimiting its development from Gascoigne to Milton, and for treating Sidney as the turning point in the story.<sup>23</sup> Sidney is England’s first Aristotelian, hence its first true anti-allegorist. In his analysis of the *Defence of*

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<sup>22</sup> As early as 1787, an edition of Sidney’s *Defence*, together with extracts from Jonson’s *Discoveries*, was published by Warton; see *Sir Philip Sydney’s Defence of Poetry. And, Observations on Poetry and Eloquence, from the Discoveries of Ben Jonson*, ed. T. Warton (London, 1787), iii: “The Public has paid, of late, so much attention to our *old Poets*, that it has been imagined a perusal of some of our *old Critics* also may be found equally agreeable”, and these are “the two earliest in our language that deserve much attention”. Haslewood’s *Ancient Critical Essays* (London, 1811-15) extended from Gascoigne’s *Certayne Notes* (1575) to Bolton’s *Hypercritica* (c.1620). Haslewood could have found a basic bibliographical account of most of the works included in his anthology in the first volume of W. Beloe’s *Anecdotes*, which might thus be the blueprint for most subsequent scholarship: see W. Beloe, *Anecdotes of Literature and Scarce Books* (London, 1807-12), 1: 229-37. This account is effectively to be attributed to G. Chalmers, as Beloe says that the idea for its compilation was suggested to him by Chalmers, who also supplied him with the materials, and whose “communications were so ample and so satisfactory, that little has been left [for me], except to methodize and arrange them” (1: 250). The list includes Gascoigne, James VI/I, Spenser (the lost *English Poete*), Webbe, Harington, Sidney, Bolton, Puttenham, Campion, and Daniel; Haslewood’s only additions to this are Meres and the Harvey-Spenser letters. After Daniel, Beloe could find no treatise on the subject until Poole’s *English Parnassus* of 1657, with the inadvertent effect – Beloe makes no conscious effort at periodisation – of presenting the period between Gascoigne and Daniel as a self-contained historical unit, a pattern observable in further pre-Spingarn collections. See *Literary Pamphlets*, ed. E. Rhys (London, 1897), and *Critical Essays and Literary Fragments*, ed. J. C. Collins (London, 1903), the latter culled from Arber’s *English Garner*, first published in 1877-90. F. E. Schelling, *Poetic and Verse Criticism of the Reign of Elizabeth* (Philadelphia, 1891), states explicitly that his limitation to 1580-1603 is due to the fact that his interest is primarily in the theory of versification (4). *English Literary Criticism*, ed. C. E. Vaughan (London, 1896), also shows that the conception of Elizabethan criticism as the first stage in the broader movement of English classicism was in place by that point: “In the strict sense, criticism did not begin till the age of Elizabeth [...]. From the Elizabethans to Milton, from Milton to Johnson, English criticism was dominated by constant reference to classical models” (x-xi). See also L. Johnson Wylie, *Studies in the Evolution of English Criticism* (Boston, 1894), who finds English classicism emerging in the works the Elizabethans, and already formed, *in parvo*, in Jonson’s *Discoveries* (6-15).

<sup>23</sup> See Spingarn, *History*, 253-60. In the background of Spingarn’s treatment of Sidney is the anomalous growth of interest in the *Defence of Poesy*, especially in the decade preceding the publication of his study. Even though most of the Elizabethan treatises were printed by Haslewood, and several received separate editions later in the century – for references, see H. F. Plett’s *Bibliography* (Leiden, 1995) – Sidney’s *Defence* is a special case. It never went out of print. After the initial editions of 1595, it was included in the 1598 volume of Sidney’s works, and was available in that form throughout the seventeenth century, while the eighteenth could consult it in Henley’s edition, as well as in the separate edition of the bare text printed in Glasgow in 1752, followed by Warton’s in 1787. Several more were published by the date of Spingarn’s *History*, including those by Thurlow (London, 1810), Arber (London, 1868), Flügel (Halle, 1889), Morley (1889; repr. London, 1909), Cook (Boston, 1890), and Shuckburgh (Cambridge, 1891). Where they contain pertinent editorial commentary, these are unanimous in completely ignoring the allegorical element in the treatise, and presenting it as a work precociously modern in its outlook: Arber points out “Sidney’s use of the word Poet and its modern acceptation” (8); Flügel praises the work’s freedom from classicist precepts, emphasizes Sidney’s praise of folk poetry, and rates him superior to his contemporaries for not giving in to moralizing – in short, “Für England kann Sidney als der früheste und bedeutendste *Ästhetiker* (im Schiller’schen Sinne) gelten” (xlix); Morley commends the “clear, direct, and manly” treatise as “the first important piece of literary criticism in our literature” (9); to Cook it presents “a link between the soundest theory of ancient times and the romantic production of the modern era” (v); to Shuckburgh, much of it is “as applicable now as when Sidney penned” it (xxxi).

*Poesy*, Spingarn predictably fails to cite any of the treatise's several references to allegory.<sup>24</sup> The only comment which acknowledges these passages occurs slightly later, in his summary of the decline of allegory in English criticism: the allegorical element is "minimized" in Sidney's treatise, its "death-knell" is sounded in Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, which is in turn said to be "foreshadowing the development of classicism, for from the time of Ben Jonson the allegorical mode of interpreting poetry ceased to have any effect on literary criticism".<sup>25</sup>

Three years later, Saintsbury cemented Spingarn's conception of Renaissance criticism in the second volume of his *History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe* – in spite of his better judgment, it may be added, for Saintsbury was no Burckhardtian. To him medieval achievements in literary practice take "equal rank as a whole with those of classical and those of modern times",<sup>26</sup> while it is the epoch of classicism, seen as one unbroken development stretching from the early sixteenth to the late eighteenth century, which takes on the role of the "middle age", the degenerative interlude between two healthy and productive literary epochs. The corollary to this, however, is the claim that medieval literary *theory* is next to nonexistent, indeed that the Middle Ages' success in the *practice* of literature is directly consequent on their lack of interest in theorizing it, and conversely, that the post-1500 explosion of classicist theory strangled the literary production of that epoch. It thus goes without saying that Saintsbury does not locate the origins of modern poetics in the Renaissance, as indicated by the tripartite division of his study into volumes on "Classical and Medieval Criticism", "From the Renaissance to the End of Eighteenth-Century Orthodoxy", and, only then, "Modern Criticism".<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *History*, 268-74.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 276-8.

<sup>26</sup> Saintsbury, *History of Criticism*, 1: 469.

<sup>27</sup> All of this runs directly against Spingarn's treatment of the subject, and in fact Saintsbury chastises him explicitly, for unfoundedly disparaging medieval literature (*ibid.*, 2: 7-8), and implicitly, addressing "our newest Neo-Classics" (2: 35), for his positive evaluation of classicism and the equation of critical modernity with classicist "reason". Predictably, Spingarn in turn found Saintsbury's sympathies to be "aggressively romantic", in an article significantly entitled "The Origins of Modern Criticism", *MP* 1 (1904): 477-96. Besides stating the central issue in no uncertain terms, the article also clearly demonstrates that the disagreements between the two pioneers of Anglophone metacriticism were a matter of perspective and emphasis rather than of truly incompatible conceptions of aesthetic modernity. After all, we have seen that Spingarn's case for "modern classicism" and its "imaginative reason" was due only in a smaller part to genuine personal conviction, and



Yet for all his Romantic sympathies, Saintsbury's section on Renaissance criticism is a faithful replica of Spingarn's book, including, in the final analysis, the treatment of Renaissance allegory, although one would never expect it on the basis of its treatment in the first volume of the study.<sup>28</sup> Although it contains numerous expressions of the modernist anti-allegorical sentiment, his view of allegory in ancient and medieval criticism is more complex than that of simple derision. He fully acknowledges its presence in ancient Greek poetics, and his account of its transmission through later antiquity and the Middle Ages is something more than a sketch. "Many ingenious and industrious hands", he says, "have traced its origin from Homer to Claudian, and from Claudian to the *Romance of the Rose*", but he does not say how poorly the story was known outside of the specialist spheres of classical and patristic studies, and that he is the first to tell it for the benefit of the general Anglophone literary public.<sup>29</sup> In

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largely to the necessity of a compromise between the same high ideals of modern aesthetics espoused by his adversary and the sobering reality of the actual critical production of the Cinquecento. While defending his thesis within its narrow confines, Spingarn is perfectly comfortable with relinquishing it on the larger scale explored by Saintsbury: "Imitation, theory, law; wit, reason, taste – each in its turn became a guiding principle of criticism, until with the romantic movement all were superseded by the concept of the creative imagination" ("Origins", 20). Thus the two can quibble over the exact nature and proportions of these successive minor modernities, while taking for granted the fact of their collective supersession by the aesthetic revelation of Romanticism.

<sup>28</sup> Saintsbury's two chapters on Italian criticism, as opposed to single ones for the French and the English, are equivalent to Spingarn's division of the subject. The Italian Renaissance equals the Cinquecento. The brief treatment of Erasmus shows him "writing in the 'false dawn'" – "the fifteenth century, even with a generous eking from the earliest sixteenth, had been a time of literary torpor and literary decadence" (*History of Criticism*, 2: 5, 10). The title of the French chapter, "The Criticism of the *Pléiade*", indicates that Saintsbury learned Spingarn's lesson the easy way, even though he takes him to task for his estimate of Du Bellay's *Defence* (2: 112). The English chapter is entitled "Elizabethan Criticism": after a quick mention of Hawes, "that curious swan-singer of English medieval poetry" (2: 146), Saintsbury jumps to Wilson, Cheke, and Ascham, of whom he has more to say as linguistic reformers, classicists, rhetoricians, and patriots than as critics – except in the case of Ascham, where he takes note of his general hostility to poetry and his specific hatred of romance, illustrative of that "great heresy" of judging literary works according to non-literary criteria (2: 154-7). It is again with Gascoigne that Renaissance criticism really begins; the "observations of Ascham, Wilson, and the others" were "incidental merely" (2: 162, n. 3). The rest of the chapter follows the beaten path, ending with Jonson.

<sup>29</sup> By comparison, Spingarn thought that mythological allegoresis was "first employed by the Sophists and more thoroughly by the later Stoics", and that moral allegoresis in particular was a Christian invention, first applied to pagan mythology by Fulgentius (*History*, 7). As late as 1981, it was possible for an otherwise informed scholar to write that "Pagan allegorism probably began before Plato, but to our knowledge it was first codified by Plato and such Platonists as Maximus of Tyre and Proclus" (Greenfield, *Poetics*, 28). Clark's account shows that more solid information was not out of reach: see D. L. Clark, *Rhetoric and Poetry in the Renaissance* (New York, 1922), 116, citing E. Hatch, *Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, ed. A. M. Fairbairn (London, 1890). Another available source was F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (London, 1886). Still, to this day, Saintsbury's remains the only general history of literary criticism in English that discusses the ancient Greek allegorists, a subject virtually absent from the treatments of the period in such comparable surveys and anthologies as C. S. Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic* (New York, 1924); J. W. H. Atkins, *Literary Criticism in Antiquity* (1934; repr. London, 1952); V. Hall, Jr., *A Short History of Literary Criticism* (London, 1963); H. Blamires, *A History of Literary Criticism* (Basingstoke, 1991); *The Norton Anthology of Literary Criticism*, ed. V. B. Leitch (New York, 2001); M. A. R. Habib, *A History of Literary Criticism* (Malden, 2005).

spite of the obvious aversion to allegory, and to allegorical interpretation in particular, on the part of the critic, it clearly exerts a certain fascination on the scholar. Even though it was hardly his business to do so, Quintilian is scolded for failing to do justice to “this great subject” – so great that “no critic has even yet exhausted, nor are a hundred critics likely to exhaust, the subtle and innumerable ramifications of its literary influence and manifestations”.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, discussing the critical outlook of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Saintsbury explicitly states that “The *sacra fames* of the whole two hundred years for Allegory [...] was not in the least checked by the Renaissance, though the sauce of what it glutted itself on was somewhat altered”.<sup>31</sup> There is thus little to prepare us for the second volume and its section on the Renaissance, where allegory’s appearances suddenly become much sparser, and sparser still in the remainder of that volume, to disappear altogether with the onset of “Modern Criticism” in the third. This is due to a number of reasons, but chiefly to Saintsbury’s governing conception of criticism as primarily concerned with the form rather than the content of literature, and the resulting conviction that allegory, especially in its interpretive aspect, “has only to do with literary criticism in the sense that it is, and always has been, a very great degrader thereof, inclining it to be busy with matter instead of form”.<sup>32</sup> Thus even though Saintsbury’s overall thesis categorically denies modernity to Renaissance

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<sup>30</sup> *History of Criticism*, 1:300, 479. On rare occasions Saintsbury can seem to exhibit some sympathy towards allegory, but it will be seen that in such instances its definition is diluted to the point of meaninglessness: “Modern readers and modern critics have usually a certain dislike to Allegory [...]. Yet in the finer sorts of literature, at any rate, the apprehension of some sort of allegory, of some sort of double meaning, is almost a necessity. The student of any kind of poetry, and the student of the more imaginative prose, can never rest satisfied with the mere literal and grammatical sense, which belongs not to literature but to science. He cannot help seeking some hidden meaning, something further, something behind, if it be only rhythmical beauty, only the suggestion of pleasure to the ear and eye and heart” (1: 11).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 448.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 11. By the same logic the Middle Ages are said to be devoid of literary criticism, even while the use of allegory as a mode of literary composition is noted as “perhaps the most characteristic” (1: 478) feature of medieval literary practice. Ironically, it is Saintsbury’s enthusiasm for the Middle Ages that saves the modernity of his Renaissance. Bent on producing a revisionist, anti-classicist account of European literary history, Saintsbury portrays medieval literature as an outburst of natural literary genius unbridled by critical constraints, but this can only be if allegory is not allowed into the fold of what counts as criticism, for in that case the Middle Ages would by no means be innocent of it. The collateral of this, however, is that the same principle must be maintained in the treatment of Renaissance criticism.

criticism, whoever consults his book for information on this particular subject will find there nothing that would contradict Spingarn's account.<sup>33</sup>

It was not long before such a notion as "modern classicism", oxymoronic as most would have found it already in 1899, became wholly obsolete, and G. Gregory Smith sets the tone for most subsequent treatments when he takes note of "the modern dislike of the classical elements in the essays".<sup>34</sup> Even so, subsequent studies retain Spingarn's scheme and along with it the malleable premise of modernity with which it is so thoroughly imbued. Thus Smith's own *Elizabethan Critical Essays* are nothing but Spingarn anthologized, and the collection's Introduction a classic example of a carefully orchestrated deployment of the evasive manoeuvres outlined above.<sup>35</sup> Spingarn himself completes the project in his *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, bridging the "dead water" between the freshly charted Elizabethan springs and the widening streams of the Restoration period.<sup>36</sup> Although Spingarn keeps up the appearances of dynastic periodisation up to the Civil War – as opposed to Restoration times, where we suddenly find ourselves in "the age of Dryden"<sup>37</sup> – it is clear that the anthology's real rationale is still the same as in his 1899 *History*. Where that book told the story of how modern criticism began, this one tells us how modern criticism matured; if Sidney and his contemporaries were England's first modern critics, Dryden is its "first *great* modern critic".<sup>38</sup>

In summary, by the first decade of the twentieth century Spingarn, Saintsbury, and Smith had between themselves refined and consolidated, if not exactly created, the canonical

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<sup>33</sup> In fact, as far as the treatment of allegory is concerned, Saintsbury surpasses his immediate predecessor, glossing over its presence even in those cases where Spingarn had acknowledged it. See Spingarn, *History*, on Petrarch (8), Mantuan (9-10), Daniello (30), Fracastoro (34), Ronsard (193), Wilson (261), Lodge (267), and Sidney (276); cf. Saintsbury, *History of Criticism*, 1: 456, 2: 42-6, 66, 119-26, 148-51, 170-6.

<sup>34</sup> See *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. G. Smith (1904; repr. Oxford, 1950), 1: xii. Significantly, the subtitle of Spingarn's study was dropped in its second edition (1908; repr. New York, 1908).

<sup>35</sup> *Essays*, ed. Smith, 1: xxiv-xxv. While acknowledging that the Elizabethan critics' "argument of the moral value of Poetry is to a great extent based on the medieval doctrine of Allegory", he hastens to add that "it is clear that with the progress of the general defence of Poetry this view becomes less important", and furthermore, the emphasis is different from that of the preceding age; though he still appeals to the "medieval" *quadrige*, Harington "rather emphasizes the attitude of the weaker capacities who take but the pleasantness of the story and the sweetness of the verse".

<sup>36</sup> See *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. J. E. Spingarn (Oxford, 1908); Saintsbury, *History of Criticism*, 2: 365.

<sup>37</sup> *Essays*, ed. Spingarn, 1: xxi.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: cvi, emphasis mine.

conception of English Renaissance literary criticism in the period which is the concern of the present study. Chronologically, it equals “Elizabethan” criticism; conceptually, it comprises the earliest stage in the development of English classicism; teleologically, it represents the origins of English literary modernity.<sup>39</sup> The progress of this emergent modernity remains measureable in degrees of its supposed, and supposedly growing, antipathy towards allegory: “The allegorical substratum of Sidney’s theory was a mediaeval survival repugnant to the seventeenth century: for the allegorist the plot or fable was merely the veil of an inner truth, the coating of a bitter but wholesome pill; for the neo-classicist it was all in all.”<sup>40</sup> The exceptions merely prove the rule: Spingarn prints Henry Reynolds’ *Mythomystes*, but is careful to identify “this perverse work” as a deviation from the straight path trod by Sidney, Jonson, and Dryden.<sup>41</sup>

Sweeting’s *Early Tudor Criticism*, a quest for “proof of a ‘Renaissance’ outlook, existing not yet in the age but in individuals”,<sup>42</sup> presents an important development in extending the field of inquiry back to the late fifteenth century, as well as in drawing attention to the educational context. However, the influence of the canonical approach is evident in her demarcation of the territory of her study as “Early Tudor”, and her statement of the book’s aim as one of identifying “the lines of preparation and advance which activate the Elizabethan material widely known through such collections as Smith’s *Elizabethan Critical Essays*”, as

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<sup>39</sup> For further consolidation, see *The Theory of Poetry in England*, ed. R. P. Cowl (London, 1914), and *English Critical Essays*, ed. E. D. Jones (1922; repr. London, 1959). Jones no longer needs any justification, so none is issued in his brief Preface, for covering “English critical thought from the Renaissance to the Revival of Romanticism” (v). Cf. also the equation of “Renaissance” with classicist criticism in C. S. Baldwin’s *Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice*, ed. D. L. Clark (New York, 1939): “The distinctive literary changes, indeed, were hardly attained before the sixteenth century. Though humanism as a theory was established in the fifteenth, the literary product of that century was generally feeble, as of a Middle Age gone to seed” (14).

<sup>40</sup> *Essays*, ed. Spingarn, 1:xviii. Cf. esp. G. A. Thompson, *Elizabethan Criticism of Poetry* (Menasha, 1914), the first topically rather than chronologically arranged study of the subject, which includes a section on “Poetry as Fiction – Allegory, Imitation” (92-112). The section is of interest for tackling the subject of allegory in a more systematic manner than previous studies – and most subsequent ones as well – but it reproduces the classic narrative: allegorical poetics, a medievalist atavism present in a number of Elizabethan authors, is “one of the chief stumbling blocks in the way of an acceptance of fiction in poetry”; it is overcome, however, by Sidney’s poetics of “ideal imitation”, “labor[ing] earnestly to set forth the high nature and significance of pure fiction and to establish it as the basis and test of poetry”; Sidney’s appeals to allegory are registered but minimized – he was “evidently not strongly of the allegorical turn of mind and doubtless was repelled by the fantastic absurdities of over-elaborate interpretations”; under Sidney’s influence, even Spenser “seems to have been on the verge of giving that free scope to his creative imagination that would relinquish allegory for ideal imitation or pure fiction”, etc.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:xxi.

<sup>42</sup> E. J. Sweeting, *Early Tudor Criticism* (Oxford, 1940), 138.

well as in her approach to allegory.<sup>43</sup> It is from Spingarn and Smith that she has learned that “One mode of examining the literary taste of the age is the study of its modifications of allegory, the ‘dominant form’ of the Middle Ages”.<sup>44</sup> These “modifications”, however, can move in only one direction, and Sweeting’s approach to allegory amounts to projecting onto “Early Tudor” materials the same narrative of gradual deallegorisation already established for the Elizabethan period.<sup>45</sup>

As Spingarn’s conception of “Renaissance” criticism was naturalized to the English corpus by a translation into “Elizabethan” terms, so it outlived the heyday of dynastic periodisation by back-translation into “Renaissance”. Indeed, the two terms become largely interchangeable, as witnessed by the use of the phrase “Elizabethan Renaissance”,<sup>46</sup> or the more common and still frequent use of the two terms in conjunction. Another variation is Pater’s “Renaissance”, which we have just seen used by Sweeting, and which is also employed in the 1947 volume in Atkins’ series of studies, the third Anglophone attempt, after Saintsbury’s and Baldwin’s, to cover the whole span from antiquity to modern times. Atkins’ innovation is in joining Sweeting’s “Early Tudor” prelude to the “Elizabethan” mainstream, making him the first to tell the story *ab ovo*, from the laying of the proverbial Erasmian egg and its hatching by Colet to the scattered critical remarks of Milton, “the last voice of the Renaissance in England”.<sup>47</sup> One consequence of this broadening of perspective is an increased

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1. The citation is from C. S. Lewis’s *Allegory of Love* (1936; repr. London, 1972), ch. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Ironically, the earliest early Tudor to be cited in her discussion is Hawes, lamenting how the poets of his day have *stopped* writing in the allegorical manner of his “mayster Lydgate”, and how they “spend theyr tyme in vaynfull vanyte/ Makyng balades of feruent amyte/ As gestes and tryfles / without fruytfulnes”; see S. Hawes, *The Pastime of Pleasure*, ed. W. E. Mead (London, 1928), ll. 48, 1390-2. To Hawes, then, the idea that he was modifying an existing allegorical tradition, not to mention liberating himself from allegory altogether, would have seemed most strange – what he saw himself as doing was resurrecting, in all its unadulterated “parfytenesse” (l. 47), a venerable tradition neglected by his literal-minded contemporaries. Sweeting further explains how the “Renaissance” rescued poetry from its allegorical thralldom in the Middle Ages (*Criticism*, 121-2), and also employs the familiar tactics of understatement and relativisation (3-5). The account of Skelton is typical, beginning with the poet’s explicit acceptance of the theory of allegory in its traditional form, and then explaining that this theory had little influence on his actual poetic practice, which sees him gradually “discarding [...] the type as he passes from the abstract to concrete and from indirect to direct statement”, and finally producing works “free of allegory”, and thus “more directly personal and human”. Of the morality play we are similarly told that “through its deployment of Allegory it is linked to a medieval dominant form”, but that it now “becomes in a special degree the mouthpiece of the early Tudor period”, and “has to be considered primarily as the product and expression of its own age” (126).

<sup>46</sup> For example by A. L. Rowse, *The Elizabethan Renaissance* (London, 1971-2).

<sup>47</sup> J. W. H. Atkins, *English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance* (London, 1947), 336.

attention to allegory. Yet even though Atkins amply acknowledges its presence in “Renaissance” poetics, he is at the same time faithfully following in Spingarn’s footsteps: thus he can claim that the allegorical view of literature is “the most prevalent” one in the period, only to add in the very same paragraph that “To modern readers this allegorical theory is obviously of historical interest only”, as it fails “to account for those qualities that have characterized great poetry throughout the ages”, and confines it “to the coteries of the initiated”.<sup>48</sup> Although Atkins attempts to cover the whole of the century, we are pulled into the “Elizabethan” orbit already around the seventieth of the book’s 363 pages; although he begins with Erasmus, Sidney’s *Defence* still finds us only in “the dawn of the great efflorescence”; although allegory is omnipresent, the day is saved by the more “illuminating” of the Elizabethans – Sidney, Puttenham, and Bacon.<sup>49</sup> The continued influence of the pattern is particularly clear in later anthologies covering the same ground as the formative collections of Smith and Spingarn, which are invariably anthologies of “Renaissance” criticism, even though their effective time-span remains the “Elizabethan” one.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 350.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 138, 150. But only on the condition of ignoring these authors’ appeals to allegory: Sidney’s in the *Defence* – which gave “the ‘poet-haters’ a crushing yet dignified reply, and this without recourse to the convenient but unsatisfying allegorical doctrine” (125) – Puttenham’s in *The Arte of English Poesy*, and Bacon’s more complex view in *De sapientia veterum* and *De augmentis scientiarum*, as further discussed below. Nor is Atkins beyond such relativising conjectures as that made about the prominence of allegory in Harington’s “Apologie”: he recognizes it as Harington’s “main line of defence”, but suspects that the “stress thus laid on the didactic function of poetry may have been partly due to a courtier’s desire to placate an offended Queen” (194-5); cf. n. 131 below.

<sup>50</sup> See *English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance*, ed. O. B. Hardison, Jr. (London, 1967); *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. B. Vickers (Oxford, 1999); *Sir Philip Sidney’s “The Defence of Poesy” and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. G. Alexander (London, 2004). Hardison’s anthology opens with a tip of the hat to Caxton and his services in the advancement of the English tongue, only to make a seven-decade leap to Wilson’s *Arte of Rhetorique*; Vickers similarly makes it to Wilson in only two stops, Elyot’s *Governor* and Surrey’s epitaph on Wyatt; with less space at his disposal, Alexander cuts straight to Gascoigne. Predictably, this is paralleled by the tendency to extend this Renaissance of the late sixteenth century well into the seventeenth, and to suppress the allegorical element in the resulting corpus. Thus neither of the anthologies includes Lodge’s “Reply to Gosson”, nor Reynolds’ *Mythomystes*, to mention only two very important works, even though these are included in the collections of Smith and Spingarn, respectively. Vickers’ antipathy towards allegory (implicit here, but see his *Appropriating Shakespeare* [New Haven, 1993], ch. 7), combined with his sympathy for rhetoric (*In Defence of Rhetoric* [Oxford, 1988]) and his conviction that the culture of Renaissance England was “a truly homogenous culture, in which theory and practice interlocked” (*Criticism*, vii), makes for a particularly indicative case. The only mention of allegory in Vickers’ introduction is in the statement, following directly on a nod back to Spingarn, that “In the Middle Ages, [...] only those works of literature were valued that had an explicitly moral and educational function, or could be given one retrospectively by allegorical interpretation” (*Criticism*, 47). In this same passage, Vickers notes that “Two outstanding early humanists confronted medieval enmity with well-argued defences, Giovanni Boccaccio in *De genealogia deorum* [...], and Coluccio Salutati in *De laboribus Herculis*” – as if these well-argued humanist defences were anything other than veritable monuments of mythological allegoresis. Appeals to allegory in

At this point, as our account of the fortunes of the allegory-modernity nexus in the study of English criticism moves into the latter half of the twentieth century, it is time to devote some attention to Weinberg's *History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* and the enormous influence that book has had, even though wholly restricted to Italian materials, on all subsequent treatments of the subject. Moreover, Weinberg's example is particularly interesting because his study was a deliberate "experiment in writing intellectual history" according to the doctrines of the so-called Chicago Aristotelianism, especially R. S. Crane's ideas about "history [...] without a thesis".<sup>51</sup> In theory, then, it is here that we should expect an approach to the history of poetical thought that will not be trying to fit the materials to any preconceived historical concepts and patterns, and we are indeed assured that the approach is determined exclusively "by the nature of the materials" themselves.<sup>52</sup> In practice, however, it is easy to see that Weinberg's approach is governed by two very definite, interrelated, and rigorously executed theses. The first is overtly stated in the Preface, where Weinberg explains that his method of discerning "the main intellectual traditions of the century as they related to literary criticism" will be "to distinguish and identify them as developments and continuations of three great critical positions of the classical past: those of Plato, Aristotle, and Horace".<sup>53</sup> Today it should be striking to see the ancient allegorists so

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works anthologized by Vickers, but omitted from his extracts, include the section "Of enlargynge examples by cōpye" in Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique*; Puttenham's *Art of English Poesy*, 1.12, where Puttenham not only endorses an allegorical understanding of mythological poetry, but mentions that he has written a whole work devoted to the subject of pagan religion, his lost "books of *Hierotechnē*", which would have in all probability been heavily allegorical in approach; two fairly short passages from Harington's "Briefe Apologie", one in which Harington exemplifies his allegorical theory of poetry by a fourfold exposition of the myth of Perseus, the other where he defends poetry, so defined, against the objections of Plato and Aristotle. See T. Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* ([London], 1553), Cc3v-Dd1v; G. Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. F. Whigham and W. A. Rebhorn (Ithaca, 2007), 119; L. Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso in English Heroical Verse*, trans. J. Harington (London, 1591), ¶4r-v.

<sup>51</sup> B. Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago, 1961), vii-viii. On Weinberg's debt to Crane, see R. Wellek, "My Answer to Bernard Weinberg's Review of My *History of Modern Criticism*", *JHI* 30 (1969): 281-2. For the cited phrase see R. S. Crane, *The Idea of the Humanities* (Chicago, 1967), 2: 174. Weinberg's allegiance to the Chicago school is made explicit in the book's dedication to Crane, R. McKeon, and E. Olson.

<sup>52</sup> Weinberg, *History*, ix.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, viii. Furthermore, these positions cannot be followed in the manner of traditional intellectual history, where either authors or ideas form the basic unit of organization, but must be traced individual text by individual text, respecting the specific configuration of ideas presented by each particular endeavour. (Cf. Crane's arguments in *Idea*, 2: 157-75, an article originally published in 1953; the parallels with the New Critical approach to literary analysis are clear – indeed, the Chicago-Aristotelian approach to analyzing critical texts may be fitly described as the New Metacriticism.) Thus it is further claimed that "any individual text, taken in its entirety, should be classifiable under one or another of the major traditions; or at least its major tendencies may

arbitrarily omitted from the list, but Weinberg is only following his sources, however unwilling he may be to acknowledge them.<sup>54</sup> If and when encountered in the texts, allegory is thus not to be treated as a vital critical position in its own right, but as an auxiliary concern at best, if not simply as a “failure” or an “inconsistency”.<sup>55</sup>

The second of Weinberg’s theses is the Burckhardtian one, mapping a teleology of modernity onto the premise of a fundamental break between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Unlike the first, it is never openly stated, for it is precisely such histories with theses that a Chicago Aristotelian seeks to avoid, yet it is betrayed by occasional slips scattered among the hundreds of pages of Weinberg’s indefatigable analyses – slips which, predictably, have to do with allegory.<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, the conviction that history can be written without a thesis leads the historian only into unconsciously adopting the most conventional, and therefore the most problematic, of theses. Once set into action, Weinberg’s experiment thus unerringly reproduces Spingarn’s old scheme. A history of Renaissance criticism might be what the title promises, yet when the question of periodisation is tackled directly, Weinberg can speak of the Renaissance only without the capital “R”, or in quotation marks, or

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be expected to bear some resemblance to one of the major tendencies of the century – unless it is a completely eclectic work” (Weinberg, *History*, viii). The obvious objection here is that eclecticism and syncretism are the norm rather than the exception in Renaissance criticism. Thus it turns out that nearly one third of the total number of critics discussed in the book (55 out of 183 by my count) cannot be firmly identified as *either* Horatians (ch. 3-6), *or* Platonists (ch. 7-8), *or* Aristotelians (ch. 9-13), but have to be discussed under at least two of these headings. Even more significant is the fact that these 55 fence-sitters are all among the 62 critics who can – according to Weinberg’s own standards, indicated by devoting titled subsections to such critics, “to call attention to the most important documents” (x) – be qualified as major. Thus the more important a critic is, the less it is possible to classify him according to the stated scheme.

<sup>54</sup> See esp. Saintsbury, *History of Criticism*, 2: 213: “The main texts and patterns of the critics of the Italian Renaissance were three – the *Ars Poetica* of Horace, the *Poetics* of Aristotle, and the various Platonic places dealing with poetry.” Cf. Spingarn, *History*, 18-23.

<sup>55</sup> Weinberg, *History*, viii. See below, n. 58, on the omission of allegory from Weinberg’s accounts of a number of important texts. Also indicative is his treatment of Horace’s *Ars poetica*, in that it wholly ignores its allegorical interpretations of the myths of Orpheus and Amphion, through which Horace’s epistle joined the numerous ancient authorities advocating the doctrine.

<sup>56</sup> Thus we read that the defence of poetry by the Horatian critics partly “consists in the allegorical interpretation of poetry, where again both a renewed Platonism and a continued medievalism enter into the sum of ‘Horatian’ ideas”, and that the “old medieval justification by allegory still serves as an auxiliary to the discussion of the utilitarian ends of poetry” (Weinberg, *History*, 109, 198). The familiar identification of allegory with the Middle Ages – a “thesis” by any, and especially by Chicago-Aristotelian standards – is matched by Weinberg’s equally revealing comment on the prominence of allegorical poetics in the 1564 commentary on Horace by Francesco Filippi Pedemonte, said to demonstrate that this critic’s “whole conception of the ends of poetry is unaffected by his study and his citation of Aristotle” (115). The implication is that a true Aristotelian cannot be an allegorist, and, *mutatis mutandis*, that a truly Renaissance critic must be an Aristotelian. This is the reason, precisely as it was with Spingarn, for pushing the emergence of “Renaissance” criticism to the Cinquecento, and specifically to the 1536 edition of the *Poetics* by A. Pazzi (367).



as disintegrated into phases.<sup>57</sup> The only escape route is the one paved by Spingarn: again the Renaissance is pushed forward to the assimilation of the rediscovered *Poetics*, again allegory is relegated to the thereby extended Middle Ages, again its presence in the texts from the hither side of the great divide is suppressed and relativized.<sup>58</sup>

Weinberg's influence has been immense, and there is no better example of it than the case of Greenfield's *Humanist and Scholastic Poetics, 1250-1500*, surveying fifteen Italian critics stretching from Dante in the thirteenth to Bartolomeo Fontius in the earliest decades of the sixteenth century, primarily in the context of Kristeller's revisionary account of humanism and scholasticism as two simultaneous and competing movements lasting throughout and beyond the Renaissance.<sup>59</sup> The influence of such scholars as Kristeller, Curtius, and Seznec makes Greenfield's the first major study of Renaissance criticism to operate on the premise of

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., ix: "I have given to the term 'Renaissance' a highly restricted meaning: I have limited it to the sixteenth century, except for those few cases in which I have found it necessary to trace a movement back into the Quattrocento. Here again, the decision was determined by the nature of the materials. The Cinquecento was the century of major development and full realization, both in poetic theory and in practical criticism; the Quattrocento, for all its overwhelming importance in other phases of the Renaissance, provided only a minor impetus in the domain of literary criticism, and the Seicento did little more than repeat and reorder the ideas of the preceding century. By 1600, the renaissance in criticism had run its full course". Later, in his edition of the *Trattati di poetica e retorica di Cinquecento*, ed. B. Weinberg (Bari, 1970-4), the term is dropped altogether.

<sup>58</sup> Weinberg's "misleadingly incidental" treatment of allegory has already been criticized by K. Borris, *Allegory and Epic in English Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, 2000), 260, n. 11-12, and 264, n. 29. Further examination confirms this criticism. Of the nearly two hundred authors discussed in Weinberg's study, only about a quarter are noted to support an allegorical view of literature, whether in general, or in relation to a particular work or genre. The figure is suspiciously low and even a cursory review reveals that Weinberg omits allegory from his accounts of a number of important and even major texts. In addition to Viperano and Fornari, mentioned by Borris, examples include commentaries on Horace by Badius (1500) and Parassio (1531), Fracastoro's *Naugerius* (1555), Minturno's *De poeta* (1559) and *L'arte poetica* (1563), Capriano's *Della vera poetica* (1555), Viperano's *De poetica* (1579), Segni's *Sopra le cose pertinenti alla poetica* (1581). See A. Moss, "Horace in the Sixteenth Century", in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: The Renaissance*, ed. G. P. Norton (Cambridge, 1999), 67-70; G. Fracastoro, *Navgerivs* (Urbana, 1924), 69-70; J. W. Biehl, "Antonio Sebastiano Minturno's *De poeta*", diss. Southern Illinois University, 1974, 31-5, 40, 94, 98-9, 228-9, 272; S. A. Minturno, *L'Arte poetica* (Venice, 1563), a2r-v, loose translation in H. B. Charlton, *Castelvetro's Theory of Poetry* (Manchester, 1913), 44; B. Hathaway, *Marvels and Commonplaces* (New York, 1968), 46, 115-16, 129; G. A. Viperano, *On Poetry* (Cambridge, 1987), 71-2, 151-2. Out of the thirteen works Weinberg classifies as the "new arts of poetry" – those "general treatises that attempt to present a total conception of the art rather than to discuss an individual point or to elucidate some phase of ancient doctrine" (*History*, 715), and which are thus to be considered as most representative of the overall theoretical outlook of the period – nine embrace allegory to at least some degree. Also worth pointing out is the fact that the allegorists are evenly distributed throughout the century, without any discernible pattern of decline, as well as among the three theoretical groupings. Commenting on L. Pariguolo's 1586 *Questione della poesia*, Weinberg notes that this critic's appeal to allegory "repeats one of the essential arguments in the early defences of poetry" and that he thus "returns to the traditions of the beginning of the century" (621). However, his teleological intuition is disproved by his own index: even without additions, the chronological distribution of the works listed in the entry for *allegory* shows no decline during the course of the century.

<sup>59</sup> See P. O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, rev. ed. (New York, 1961), ch. 5. Kristeller contributed a Foreword to Greenfield's book.

continuity rather than rupture between medieval and postmedieval tradition, which has numerous important repercussions, particularly in the role assigned to allegory. Thus Greenfield explicitly criticizes “the nineteenth-century prejudice that allegory was a medieval invention rejected by humanists, who turned to a nonallegorical antiquity”, as well as the view of “Late Crocean aestheticians like Spingarn”, who “have read the humanist emphasis on ‘form’ as an emphasis on beauty and pleasure for its own sake”, a view which “does not find support in humanist poetics”.<sup>60</sup> On the contrary, not only is scriptural allegoresis essential to both scholastic and humanist modes of thought, but non-scriptural allegoresis is a specifically humanist cause and indeed the “central issue” in the humanist-scholastic debate.<sup>61</sup>

Accordingly, the traditional configuration of the allegory-modernity nexus is turned on its head. It is scholasticism, grounded in the new translations of Aristotle, that presents a novelty in the intellectual landscape of thirteenth-century Italy, while it is humanism that “retained the general scheme of medieval culture against the contemporary attempt of the scholastic culture to supersede it”, and it is scholasticism, in accordance with Aquinas’ dictum that “In no science invented by humans [...] can be found anything but the literal sense”, that denounces the allegorical approach to secular literature, while it is humanism that champions it.<sup>62</sup> All this, needless to say, strikes right at the root of the Spingarnian orthodoxy – or rather,

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<sup>60</sup> Greenfield, *Poetics*, 32.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 28: “humanist traditions of the *poeta theologus* and *philosophus* generated the central issue of the humanists-scholastic controversy, which concerned the validity of the allegorical interpretation of the Bible and its extension to poetry”.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 20, 51. The argument comes from Curtius’ discussion of the polemics between the pro-allegorical A. Mussato and the anti-allegorical Dominican G. de Mantua in the 1310s: “All the critics agree upon this thesis: Mussato was a Humanist and thus a forerunner of the Renaissance; this is demonstrated by the fact that he opposed the enemies of poetry. But all the critics fail to go into Fra Giovanino’s theses and hence into the central issue of the controversy. The monk makes his attack not on poetry but on the idea that poetry is an *ars divina* and even a theology. [...] But [Mussato’s] theory of poetry and his controversy with Fra Giovanino have little to do with the Humanism of the trecento. As a poet and as a theorist of poetry, Mussato follows the paths which the Latin poetry of the North had long since opened. In the controversy, he represents tradition – or, if anyone prefers, reaction. The Dominican, on the other hand, represents the thinking which at that time was modern: Aquinas’s theory of knowledge and of art. Behind this opposition, to be sure, there lies the eternal quarrel between the philosopher and the poet. Thomism made the quarrel flare up anew” (*Literature*, 216-21). For a critique of Greenfield’s emphasis on Aquinas, see *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott (Oxford, 1988), 10-11. However, Minnis and Scott only object that Aquinas is atypical, and that other scholastics were less averse to secular allegoresis, not to the claim for the centrality of allegory to humanist poetics. Greenfield herself acknowledges that the line between “humanist” and “scholastic” could become blurred, or at least that card-carrying humanists and scholastics could still enjoy “friendly and even close relationships”, and that their “competition was not a personal but a cultural one” (*Poetics*, 147). Interesting, for example, is the case of Dominici vs. Salutati, with the scholastic Dominici dedicating his *Lucula noctis* to none other than the arch-humanist Salutati, just like S. Gosson would dedicate his *Schoole of Abuse* to Sidney.

it almost does, for there is another major influence on Greenfield's thesis which pulls in the opposite direction, that of Weinberg and the unquestioned authority of his two imposing, densely packed tomes.<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, Weinberg's influence determines the book's overall conceptual and historical framework. Not even Kristeller can withstand it. Greenfield repeatedly cites Kristeller's *Renaissance Thought*, where the Renaissance is defined as "that period of Western European history which extends approximately from 1300 to 1600, without any preconceptions as to the characteristics or merits of that period, or of those periods preceding and following it".<sup>64</sup> The obvious objections to the latter portion of this statement can be passed over here; what is important is that Kristeller, like most other scholars, sees the Renaissance as lasting from the fourteenth through the sixteenth century, with the "approximately" added to account for the few decades of overflow into the thirteenth century in the case of Italy, and into the seventeenth in the transalpine countries. Accordingly, in his Foreword to Greenfield's book Kristeller defines the period covered in it as that of "the later Middle Ages and the early Renaissance".<sup>65</sup> Just two pages later, however, in the opening sentence of Greenfield's own Preface, we meet with a crucially different description: "While the history of literary criticism in the Renaissance has been written several times", she begins, "practically no work has been devoted to humanist poetics, that is, to the development of a theory of poetry from Petrarch to Pontano".<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Just how deep this influence runs is most clearly seen in Greenfield's Preface: her whole methodology is simply taken over from Weinberg's Preface to his *History*, to the point where what she evidently thinks of as her own sentences are sometimes almost verbatim reproductions of Weinberg's. Thus Greenfield notes that she has "not followed any author through his career or any concept through the century" (*Poetics*, 12). Given that her study encompasses two and a half centuries, one is puzzled by this reference to "the century", until it triggers the memory of a passage from Weinberg's *History*: "I have not sought to follow any author through his career or any term and concept through the century" (viii). Other examples include: "What I have said about each text does not represent the totality of its contents" (Greenfield, *Poetics*, 12); "what I have said about any individual text is not intended to represent the totality of its contents" (Weinberg, *History*, viii); "I present them [i.e. the translations included in the study] with the usual modesty of the translator" (Greenfield, *Poetics*, 13); "I present these translations with the usual reservations of the translator" (Weinberg, *History*, x).

<sup>64</sup> Kristeller, *Thought*, 3-4.

<sup>65</sup> Greenfield, *Poetics*, 9.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 11. This is no slip: the division between "Humanist and Scholastic" and "Renaissance" is both conceptual and chronological, and is maintained methodically throughout the book. "Humanist and scholastic poetics, and thus Humanism and Scholasticism, were not replaced the one by the other. They were revived about the same time and grew side by side until the Renaissance." The acceptance, *via* Weinberg, of Spingarn's equation of the Renaissance with the recovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* is particularly clear in statements such as the one that "Out of this medieval Neoplatonic tradition there emerges a group of doctrines that reappears in the poetics of all the major humanists up to the Renaissance, when the influence of the *Poetics* definitely overtakes

It should be clear by this point that much more than terminology is at stake. Defining the subject as “Renaissance” or even “early Renaissance” would bring Greenfield into direct conflict with Weinberg, and through him, with the whole canonical conception of the subject outlined in the preceding pages. It would raise some very awkward questions, for example that of the fate of allegory in the post-1500 period: how did an issue that had been of “central” importance for two and a half centuries become virtually irrelevant almost overnight? More broadly, it would make one think twice about Weinberg’s dismissal of the Quattrocento as having “provided only a minor impetus in the domain of literary criticism”, and consequently of his whole conception of “Renaissance” criticism.<sup>67</sup> Does it make more sense to find Renaissance criticism practiced in the period, and by the figures, to which that term customarily applies, or to make it begin almost at the point at which the Italian Renaissance, as commonly understood, ends? Eventually, such questions would reverberate in the scholarship on the English tradition. Does it make sense to begin the story of English Renaissance criticism in the final quarter of the sixteenth century, more than a hundred years after the early stirrings of English humanism, and many decades after Erasmus and Colet? By dropping the curtain at 1500, and excising the word “Renaissance” from her vocabulary, Greenfield elegantly avoids such questions, but also forfeits the chance to make a more substantial revision of the canonical account of the subject.

While the achievements of either Weinberg’s *History* or Greenfield’s *Poetics* are not to be disputed, the latter should serve as a warning against uncritically accepting the distinctly Spingarnian underpinnings of the former. A more recent example of such uncritical reception is afforded by Glyn P. Norton’s Introduction to the Renaissance volume in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, in which Norton fails to mention any of his numerous predecessors until he reaches the final paragraph, where, in “One final coda”, he showers

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the Neoplatonic influence” (*Poetics*, 24; cf. 269). Except when referring to the scholarship of others, notably Kristeller, the term “Renaissance” is almost never employed in relation to any of the authors discussed in the book, including such major fifteenth-century figures as Ficino or Poliziano.

<sup>67</sup> Weinberg, *History*, ix.

praise on Weinberg.<sup>68</sup> However, while Weinberg's influence on Norton is certainly clear, several contributions to the volume espouse positions wholly incompatible with Weinberg's, especially with respect to the troublesome subject of allegory.<sup>69</sup> This tension is emblematic of the state of scholarship on English Renaissance criticism, where in spite of all the work, beginning with the so-called "Revolt of the Medievalists" in the early decades of the twentieth century, which has sought to revise the classic Burckhardtian conception of the Renaissance, in spite of the now easily accessible fruits of what has been termed the "'golden age' for the study of medieval literary theory and criticism", and finally, the enormous advances in the research on the allegorical tradition already discussed in the Introduction, Spingarn's narrative survives almost unscathed.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *History*, ed. Norton, 21: "The luminosity of his scholarship has not dimmed over the years and, as this volume attests, continues to invigorate critical dialogue and bring us back to fundamental theoretical issues about great writing."

<sup>69</sup> For example, already in the second chapter, M. Jeanneret's on "Renaissance Exegesis", we are told that "Allegorical reading was particularly active in Italy, where (there being no gap between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance) it continued well into the sixteenth century" (*ibid.*, 37). By contrast, in his own editorial synthesis Norton can still accommodate allegory only under the standard Spingarnian terms: the sole mention of it occurs in a comment on how the chaste marriage of Philology and Protestantism put an end to the depraved *ménage à quatre* of medieval exegesis (4). Erasmus is noted as "chief" (4) among those instrumental in achieving this end, yet in Jeanneret's chapter (40), as well as in M. O'Rourke Boyle's on "Evangelism and Erasmus" (48-9), we are duly reminded that Erasmus was in fact a fervent advocate of scriptural allegoresis. Allegory goes unmentioned even in relation to the Florentine Neoplatonists (16), yet several contributors (37, 67, 91-2, 153, 162, 204) go on to explain that Renaissance Neoplatonism was in fact very much invested in allegory, including M. J. B. Allen, in whose chapter on "Renaissance Neoplatonism" it is particularly emphasized and indeed described as the "key to the validity of poetry in the Platonic republic" (439). In spite of this, Norton uses "Renaissance" and "early modern" interchangeably, and notes that Renaissance criticism breathes an "air of modernity" (2, 8). The blurb promotes the volume as being "the first to explore as part of an unbroken continuum the critical legacy both of the humanist rediscovery of ancient learning and of its neoclassical reformulation", a claim inexplicable in the light of the efforts of the Edwardians – particularly the second volume of Saintsbury's *History* – and at the same time testimony to their lasting influence.

<sup>70</sup> See Ferguson, *Renaissance*, ch. 11; *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: The Middle Ages*, ed. A. Minnis and I. Johnson (Cambridge, 2005), 3. Spingarn's influence extends even to studies which have diverged from the dominant pattern in other respects. Such is the case, for example, with V. Hall, Jr., *Renaissance Literary Criticism* (New York, 1945), a genuinely ground-breaking attempt at a socially contextualized examination of the subject – and one omitted, as it happens, in R. Matz's *Defending Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000). Hall's analyses are purest New Historicism, minus the Foucauldian jargon and neo-Burckhardtian presentism: not only does Renaissance criticism reflect the ideological agenda of the Renaissance elite, it also vitally participates in its production and dissemination. Moreover, Hall makes no attempt to conceal his disgust with this elite: the ruthless absolutism of the rulers, the pedantic snobbery of the humanists, and ultimately – and intimately related to these – the esoteric authoritarianism of the critics. Not that it was ever unknown that the Renaissance had a dark side, so memorably portrayed in those inimitable vignettes in Burckhardt's *Civilization*, the stuff of contemporary horror fiction: zombie-like bands of murderous peasants roaming the apocalyptic landscape in the aftermath of the invasion of Charles VIII, Ferdinand I chuckling as he shows off his museum of mummies, Cesare Borgia prefiguring the monstrosities of Ellis's *American Psycho*. Yet although such things make "one's hair stand on end", Burckhardt still concludes that "Good and evil lie strangely mixed together in the Italian States of the fifteenth century", and that "to form an adequate moral judgment" of such figures, and of the age which they are taken to epitomize, "is no easy task" (*Civilization*, 11, 24). The title of the famous chapter is "The State as a Work of Art", one section of which is titled "War as a

Given the critical bent of this conclusion and the foregoing analyses, it is perhaps worth emphasizing at this point what should be obvious enough, namely that the corpus of works we have been discussing does not represent the whole of the scholarship on Renaissance criticism, which contains numerous worthy contributions by several generations of scholars, of which many will receive mention in the remainder of this chapter. The focus here has been almost exclusively on anthologies and book-length studies, especially those which may be taken as representative of the established opinion on the subject – and of course even in these there is much that is valuable in spite of the interpretive biases that I have tried to bring to light. Their authors went to work under the influence of the established historical conception of the Renaissance, expecting to find a corresponding state of affairs in their own field of inquiry. When they could not find it in the Renaissance as commonly understood – late thirteenth through sixteenth century in Italy, with variable amounts of transalpine delay – they were forced to resort to measures which distorted the notion almost beyond recognition.

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Work of Art". For Hall, however, writing in the shadow of a war the likes of which Burckhardt, for all his premonitions, could not begin to imagine, the task is easy enough: "Hitler, we know, asserted that he is ruling under the constitution; so did the Medici" (*Criticism*, 4). At least one reviewer – F. M. Krouse in *MLN* 61 (1946): 135-6 – recognized the direct confrontation with Burckhardt: "Mr. Hall's sharp departure from Burckhardt's view of the Renaissance state as a work of art is also of interest: to Mr. Hall the work of art is a state." But if this chiasmus anticipates L. Montrose's celebrated dictum about the historicity of texts and the textuality of history, of the idea that we are dealing with a modern or even a protomodern poetics – an idea still essential to much of the work that unfolded under the banners of the New Historicism and Cultural Materialism – there is not a trace. How could a twentieth-century reader possibly relate to poetical doctrines in which "the aristocratic, hierarchical society is accepted as the norm", and which make one wonder "whether a more liberal democratic idea was even possible in that age" (Hall, *Criticism*, 2)? Yet if there is no trace of Burckhardtian presentism, there is no trace of allegory either, even though nothing so aptly exemplifies the sentiment of *odi profanum vulgus* which Hall analyzes across the three national traditions. For example, the very phrase – Horace's, of course, from *Odes*, 3.1.1 – appears as the motto on the title page of Olney's edition of Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* (London, 1595), or in the epistle to Chapman's *Ouids Banquet of Sence* (London, 1595), published in the same year, encouraging an allegorical reading of the poem: "The prophane multitude I hate, & onelie consecrate my strange Poems to these searching spirits, who[m] learning hath made noble, and nobilitie sacred" (A2r). See also Clark's *Rhetoric and Poetry in the Renaissance*, where we find a radicalized version of Saintsbury's position, reproducing Spingarn's formative account even as it emphatically denies the modernity on which this account was premised. Clark's narrative amounts almost wholly to that of the "gradual abandonment" in Renaissance poetics of "the popular mediaeval preoccupation with allegory, in favour of the classical view which considered example as the best vehicle for moral improvement", a trajectory fully accomplished in Italian, but making "slow headway" in English criticism" (132, 139). "In particular the vogue of allegory did not yield to the idea of moral example transferred from rhetoric to poetic" (139), and Clark traces its persistence in Wilson, Gascoigne, Lodge, Harington, Webbe, and Reynolds, but not in Puttenham and Bacon – the latter is said to "have given the *coup de grace* to allegory in England" (156); cf. Spingarn's "death-knell" (*History*, 276) – and only partly in Sidney (148). All of this is entirely conventional. Unconventional, however, is Clark's final paragraph, revealing his view of the present significance of his subject: his study, as he has says, has been one of "critical perversions", and the "failure" of Renaissance poetics "should serve as a warning" against any further "confusion between rhetoric and poetic" (161). Thus even authors who denounce Renaissance criticism as an ideological and/or aesthetic perversion find themselves reproducing the canonical pattern, even though built on premises diametrically opposite to their own.

This is, emphatically, not to say that all these scholars were simply in the wrong. In fact, the consistency of their failures to produce a viable history of Renaissance poetics is actually a rather conclusive success, proving that they did not blindly impose their premises on materials that so strongly resisted them, and that they knew better than to bow to the logic of broad cultural history when this logic threatened to obscure specifically literary-historical developments. In other words, it is not because of a lack of able pens that a coherent account of Renaissance poetics has not yet been written, but because of a conceptual impasse at the very heart of the subject these pens have proposed to treat. A viable history of Renaissance poetics has not yet been written because it cannot be written, and the reason why it cannot be written is that the concept of the Renaissance, as originally formulated in reference to the spheres of classical learning and the fine arts, and subsequently expanded into a whole-scale cultural epoch said to represent the emergence of Western modernity, the dawning of the world as we still know it, did not take into account a substantial portion of the literary and literary-critical materials produced in the period the concept is supposed to cover. Therefore these materials will always remain a foreign body in any literary history of the period which rises to Wellek's old challenge of being both literary and a history, and will keep returning to haunt anyone who, unconvinced by the present analysis, decides to take another swing at the same impossible task.

Allegory, as we have seen, is the chief among these revenants. Historians perform rushed funerals of this arch-nemesis of modern aesthetics, but from its uneasy grave allegory keeps pulling the strings. Suppressed as an increasingly irrelevant medieval atavism, it revenges itself by making this suppression the true burden – spoken or unspoken, conscious or unconscious – of the canonical accounts of the subject. It is allegory that drove Spingarn to equate Renaissance with classicist criticism and delay it to at least the middle of the sixteenth century. It is allegory that has made Spingarn's successors retain his framework even after its original rationale lost the last of its intellectual and aesthetic currency. It is allegory that has led these Burckhardtians to begin their Renaissances precisely at the point where Burckhardt's ends, thus making them arrive to the exact same conclusion as their revolted

medievalist opponents. Even in their attempts to deny allegory's presence in the period, researchers who refused to run away from the evidence still found themselves witnessing that same phenomenon of the "Renaissance" retreating into the future, and the "Middle Ages" advancing into the space it leaves behind, that scholars like Allen or Seznec, coming from the diametrically opposite position, were observing in the 1930s and 1940s. What is the use, then, of forcing a certain concept onto materials which resist this concept to such a degree that we can proceed only by emptying it of the very content for which it had originally recommended itself to us?

As long as the study of Renaissance poetics clings to variations on the Burckhardtian conception of the period, and the premise of modernity inscribed in that conception, things will not make sense, and scholars will continue to find themselves postponing their Renaissances by decades and centuries, enveloping them in scare quotes, dissecting them into phases, refining them out of existence. However, as soon as their narratives are approached in the raw, suspending their teleological baggage, many things begin to make sense. We see how the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* gave a fresh impulse to the critical production of the sixteenth century; how the first reaction to this difficult text, long-lost in its original form and espousing views alien to the sixteenth-century literary mind, was to harmonize it with the more conventional teachings of the age; how this harmonization eventually matured into the full-scale doctrine of literary classicism; how this development, stretching throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and the eighteenth century, represents a coherent, intelligible unit in the development of Western poetics. Indeed, this is what our major histories of "Renaissance" criticism mostly are: histories of the emergence and early stages of literary classicism. It is not the business of the present study to say what kind of histories of classicism they are, and with what degree of success they treat this complex, long-lived, international literary phenomenon. My concern is not with what they are, but with what they are not, and what they are not is viable histories of poetical thought in the period they set out to cover. The following question now poses itself: if the suppression of allegory is a major or even the main reason for this failure, can it be remedied by undoing this suppression and rewriting the history of sixteenth-



and seventeenth-century English poetics in a way which assigns an integral role to the allegorical element in the poetical doctrine of the period? It is to the weighing and the tentative answering of this question that the remainder of this chapter is devoted.

## HOMO LITERATUS

To begin an account of English “Renaissance” criticism in the 1570s is to begin *in medias res* – no wonder, then, that it makes for a good story, but not very good history. It is true that until the 1570s issues belonging to the sphere of poetics were raised sporadically, in the most heterogeneous array of works. To a considerable degree this remains the case even after the 1570s, but from that point on poetics suddenly becomes bibliographically visible in the form of vernacular prose treatises specifically devoted to the subject. Thus the impression one gets from the bibliographic record, which is then reproduced in the histories and the anthologies, is that of a long silence broken by a sudden outpouring of new voices, recovering the long-forgotten mysteries of the poetic art in their reinvigorated and flourishing mother tongue. This sudden and unprecedented abundance of specialized critical materials in the vernacular is certainly a phenomenon worthy of the ample attention it has received, and clearly marks the beginning of more institutionalized and self-conscious stage in English criticism. Yet however conveniently it may seem to fit the standard account of the Renaissance as the light at end of the long and dark medieval tunnel, this impression is to a large degree illusory, at least as far as it concerns the fundamental questions of poetic theory.

In fact, a claim could be made that it is precisely this unprecedented richness which has, in this crucial respect, impoverished our understanding of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English poetics. However commendable in themselves, the efforts of editors and anthologists to encompass and sample the totality of the period’s variegated critical activity have tended to obscure the situation with the narrower question of theoretical fundamentals. The quantitative increase in overall critical activity has been taken to indicate a qualitative change in fundamental theoretical outlook, even though it is clear that the latter need not

necessarily follow from the former. And yet, the claim for the emergence of poetic modernity in this period has been based precisely on the presumption of qualitative rather than merely quantitative change – specifically, the presumption of the decline of the “didactic” view of poetry, and of the decline of allegory as its most tangible manifestation. Therefore, in order to produce a more viable account of the fortunes of English poetical thought in the period, the familiar accounts of the consolidation of a national literary tradition, the rise of the vernacular, the development of prosody, the introduction of continental influences, the emergence of the critic, and any number of other subjects, however important in their own right, need to be carefully disentangled from the inquiry into the fate of the theoretical fundamentals – if only so they can be re-entangled in more coherent and insightful ways.

For the purposes of the present study, this is perhaps most urgently the case with the polemical context in which the period’s criticism operates. The prominence of the allegorical conception of literature in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English poetics is to a considerable degree due to this polemical context and the desire to defend literature, especially in its most contentious aspects – its representations of the supernatural, the erotic, the immoral, the socially inferior – from a more literal-minded view which seeks simply to remove these aspects from the ambit of respectable imaginative literature. This, of course, is the sort of context allegory had always thrived in. However, while they do acknowledge the polemical aspect of the period’s poetics, most accounts continue to misrepresent it on a number of important counts, hanging on to the traditional view which pits “Puritan” attackers of poetry against its “humanist” defenders, or to a number of other, equally unsatisfactory, alternatives. It is thus still worth briefly pointing out the inadequacies of such views, even though most of these have been long acknowledged, at least in principle, in the more perceptive scholarship on the subject.

The identification of the poet-hater as “Puritan” basically results from a conflation of the quarrel over poetry with the partially related but distinct matter of the quarrel over the popular stage. This is in fact another consequence of the agenda set by the Edwardian pioneers and its post-1575 focus, in which the publication of Stephen Gosson’s 1579 *Schoole*

of *Abuse*, along with the ensuing replies of Lodge and Sidney, inevitably emerges as the earliest and the most tangibly polemical event of the period.<sup>71</sup> Since Gosson's primary target was not poetry but the popular stage, he was easily lumped with, and even taken to be representative of, the cause of the antitheatrical controversialists; conversely, the enemies of the stage are also proclaimed enemies of poetry. From this further distortions follow, including the notion that the attack was indiscriminately levelled at all imaginative literature, or even fiction or imagination itself;<sup>72</sup> that the arguments of the attackers, while instrumental in eliciting the responses of the critics, do not in themselves constitute documents in criticism and poetic theory, and therefore do not merit representation in accounts of the period's critical and poetical thought;<sup>73</sup> that only the defenders' views were characteristic of the period whereas those of the attackers were either a medieval residuum, or are in fact equally characteristic of any age.<sup>74</sup> Thus the spotlight tends to fall on the reasoned, learned, and

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<sup>71</sup> See S. Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse* (London, 1579). Cf. E. N. S. Thompson, *The Controversy between the Puritans and the Stage* (New York, 1903): the view of the enemies of poetry as Puritans "seems to have gained foothold through exaggeration of the importance of Gosson's 'pleasant invective' in his *School of Abuse*, and in general through the confused application to non-dramatic poetry of attacks on the drama" (6).

<sup>72</sup> On this count the earlier scholarship actually offers more nuanced views than some of the later work. Thus Spingarn notes that Gosson "specifically insists that his intention was not to banish poetry, or to forbid harmless recreations to mankind, but merely to chastise the abuse of all these" (*History*, 266). Smith similarly writes that the two parties were "in amiable agreement on the viciousness of the Vice", even as they argued "for and against the claims of poetry from different premises" (*Essays*, 1: xx). More recently, however, the simplistic notion of an indiscriminate, religiously motivated attack occurs, for example in Vickers (*Criticism*, 47) or Alexander (*Criticism*, lv), and even in such revisionist accounts as those of R. Fraser, *The War against Poetry* (Princeton, 1970), and P. C. Herman, *Squitter-wits and Muse-haters* (Detroit, 1996). While undeniably important in drawing attention to the social context of the debate, Fraser's account of the period's anti-poetic sentiment is marred by its utter lack of discrimination: between poetry and theatre – "The campaign to close the theatres and the war against poetry are one" (16); between various types of imaginative literature – "To reprehend all poems and poets is, from the point of view of the root-and-branch reformer, the only tenable position"; even between various types of discourse – the reformers' is supposedly an "abhorrence of words as words" (11). In spite of his sensitive analysis of the "Protestant antipoetic sentiment" in the work of such figures as Sidney, Spenser and Milton, Herman similarly continues to view their opponents as religiously motivated enemies of "all poetry" and even "fictiveness" as such (24-7).

<sup>73</sup> "It is noteworthy that the greater forces which stimulated this literary defence were themselves unliterary. They are not represented in these volumes, except in the answers of their adversaries. [...] There is no criticism in these things: merely the old war against the Devil and his work" (*Essays*, ed. Smith, 1: xiv-xviii). The argument remains commonplace in much of the later literature, and continues to govern the one-sided approach adopted in the anthologies; Hardison's is still the only to include a single text by one of the "attackers" – an extract from Gosson's *Schoole*. On this ground, Alexander omits even Lodge's reply to Gosson: "The works have little to say about literature, and are not represented in this collection" (*Criticism*, ed. Alexander, lv).

<sup>74</sup> "These objections to literature are not characteristically medieval. They have sprung up in every period of the world's history, and especially in all ages in which ascetic and theological conceptions of life are dominant" (Spingarn, *History*, 6). The appeal of this argument is clear: to claim the desirable elements in the period's critical output for the Renaissance, while transferring undesirable ones onto another (trans-)historical category. Spingarn's view is strongly reiterated in Thompson's *Controversy*, which opens with a description of Puritanism as "a phase of English thought not indigenous alone to the British Isle, nor even restricted to one historic period",

eloquent treatises of the defenders, while their opponents are reduced to a backdrop of fanatical vituperation, and a debate misconceived to begin with is done further injustice by being presented in a radically one-sided manner.

What is, however, particularly detrimental about the “Puritan”-“humanist” dichotomy, as well as its later incarnations, is its tendency to obscure the existence of a conflict on the question of poetry deeply rooted within humanism itself.<sup>75</sup> In a more comprehensive view, it soon becomes clear that Gosson’s *Schoole* is more correctly seen as a novel development in a much older tradition of a distinctly humanist hostility to certain aspects of imaginative literature. Far from being representative, the *Schoole*, with its reliance on *Prophane Writers*, *Naturall reason*, and *common experience*, its fashionable euphuistic style, and most importantly, its actual appraisal of poetry, coherent in its balanced estimation of its wiles and benefits, is in fact that single least representative document in the entire antitheatrical controversy. It is, however, perfectly representative of a strand of poetic theory firmly and sometimes radically literalist in its approach to poetic fiction, while also unmistakably humanist in its fundamental principles and formative background.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, this

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and goes on to define it as any “effort to rid life, or some phase of it, of the evils that have enwrapped it [...], whatever variations it may assume at different times and at different places” (1). In turn, Thompson’s work, especially the first chapter, reads like the blueprint for Barish’s influential survey of “antitheatrical prejudice” from Plato to the mid-twentieth century: while acknowledging his subject to “evolve with time”, Barish also sees it as “an aberration [...] to which virtually our whole species seems in some measure prone”, “a kind of ontological malaise” of “nearly universal dimension”; see J. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, 1981), 2-3.

<sup>75</sup> This also applies to its later, less simplistic incarnations. Kinney, for example, follows Ringler in explicitly dismissing the accepted view of Gosson as a Puritan, presenting him instead as “almost a classic case study of the growth of an English humanist”, but ends up unable to fully grant him the title: in spite of his intellectual formation, Gosson turns out not to be “a true humanist”, indeed to be an “anti-humanist (though Gosson seems not to have noticed)”, and ultimately a representative of what “was not yet what would be known in the seventeenth century as ‘Puritanism’”. See W. Ringler, *Stephen Gosson* (Princeton, 1942), 8-10; S. Gosson, *Markets of Bawdrie*, ed. A. F. Kinney (Salzburg, 1974), 1-2, 28, 55, 67. Herman frames the conflict as one “between humanist poetics and Protestant antipoetics” (*Squitter-Wits*, 64), an opposition even less satisfactory than the one between “humanist” and “Puritan” for what should be obvious reasons. It is telling that at one place he misquotes Smith as writing about the attacks on poetry of “a vigorous Protestantism” (6), where the original actually reads “a vigorous Puritanism” (*Essays*, ed. Smith, 1: xiv).

<sup>76</sup> This is why the *Schoole* provoked an immediate reply from those who were content to ignore all earlier and later missives from the antitheatrical camp, or in fact joined its ranks, just as most antitheatrical controversialists either ignored the question of poetry, or actually took a favourable view of it. The reception of Gosson’s work is incomprehensible if this is overlooked. Herman, for example, describes the *Schoole* as “Clearly [...] not an impressive document” and insists on its hostility towards “all poetry”, dismissing Gosson’s explicit statements to the contrary as “rhetorical” rather than “substantive”, but then has to wonder “why Sidney and the other defenders of poetry had such trouble responding to its charges” (*Squitter-Wits*, 27, 219, n. 41). There were a number of comprehensive defences of poetry between 1573 and 1642, none of which undertakes to defend the popular stage, at least not without proposing its radical reform, as for example Lodge’s “Reply to

tendency in humanist poetics must also be distinguished from the hostility towards low- and middle-brow literature such as romances, popular stories, ballads, songs, and so forth. While some of the best known examples come from humanist figures, such as Ascham's attack on Arthurian romance and translations of contemporary Italian authors in *The Schoolemaster*, the issue itself is not specific to humanism, and such protests against "wicked" and "wanton" books are voiced by social commentators and polemicists of all stripes.<sup>77</sup> These are not concerned with imaginative literature as such but rather with "pulp fiction", and can perhaps be seen as roughly analogous to contemporary debates on Internet pornography and video-game violence.<sup>78</sup> They are not without critical relevance, in the broad sense – for one thing, they give us, albeit in negative form, some indication of popular literary tastes and interests – but most often it is impossible to recover their authors' views on broader questions of poetic theory.

Rather than these broad-ranging controversies over the popular theatre and popular literature, it is the internal conflict between two competing types of distinctly humanist poetics – a conflict within humanism, rather than between humanism and something else – that is of prime importance to historians of the period's poetic thought. This conflict is difficult to discern because it appears to have no major printed vernacular representative except Gosson, and because there was a considerable degree of agreement between the two factions. Both believed the end of imaginative literature to lie in pleasurable edification; both attacked works which they did not, and defended those which they did believe to be conducive to this end; both could accommodate the major critical vocabularies of the day and

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Gosson" ([London, 1579?]), C4v-5v. By contrast, there was only one comprehensive defence of the popular stage, which explicitly refrained from entering the question of poetry: see T. Heywood, *An Apology For Actors* (London, 1612), B3r. Gosson gloated over the fact that the opponents of his *Schoole* "trauailed to some of mine acquaintance of both Universities, with fayre profers, and greater promises of rewardes, yf they would take so much paines as to write against mee", but came back empty-handed; see S. Gosson, *The Ephemerides of Phialo* (London, 1579), M2r. Hostility towards the theatre, and the popular stage in particular, did not automatically entail hostility towards poetry. For example, Northbrooke's *Treatise* (London, 1577) attacks the public stage on the *Authoritie of the word of God and auncient writers* even while displaying a serene acceptance of the pagan poets, who are quoted throughout, occasionally in Northbrooke's own verse translations.

<sup>77</sup> R. Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (London, 1570), I2v-3v. In the same passage, Ascham gives an allegorical reading of Homer, specifically of the Circe episode, including the moly given to Ulysses, "Whereby, the Diuine Poete *Homer* ment couertlie (as wise and Godly men do iudge) that loue of honestie, and hatred of ill [is] the onely remedie against all inchantementes of sinne" (H4v).

<sup>78</sup> It is this phenomenon that is really the subject of Fraser's misleadingly titled *War against Poetry*, where numerous examples are cited.

find support in an inexhaustible array of classical, patristic, medieval, and contemporary authorities. Where they parted ways was the question of how to treat works of serious and respectable imaginative literature containing elements which were, at least on the surface, deemed to be ontologically or morally offensive: representations of pagan deities and other supernatural beings, romantic and erotic passion, crime, and so forth. This most notably applied to the ancient classics, which held an essential place in the educational system and the literary culture produced by this system, even as they inevitably relied on the fabulous and licentious mythology of the pagans, but any argument about ancient poetry was in principle applicable to poetry in general.

The main features and principal intellectual origins of the two schools of thought may be conveniently sketched out from the works of two major humanist figures who both had a direct influence on the intellectual life of sixteenth-century England: Erasmus and Vives. Erasmus' profound influence is amply acknowledged: altogether he spent some six years in England during his visits between 1499 and 1517, befriended and corresponded with some of the leading English intellectuals of the period, lectured at Cambridge, and played a major role in the establishment of the humanist curriculum in English schools. An important and under-appreciated aspect of this influence is Erasmus's promotion of the allegorical understanding of both sacred and secular literature, encountered throughout his works, many of which were available in English translations. As a scholar of the biblical text, he was a radical innovator; as its interpreter, however, he was a staunch traditionalist, siding with the allegorical tradition against the literalism of the reformers.<sup>79</sup> There is perhaps no better example than Erasmus of

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<sup>79</sup> See, for example, the *Enchiridion*, quoted here in its earliest English translation (London, 1533), B7v: "Of the i[n]terp[re]tours of scripture / chose them aboue al other [that] go farthest fro[m] the letter / which chefely next after Paule be Origene / Ambrose / Jerom & Augustyne." Ironically, the translator would seem to be none other than W. Tyndale, of whom Foxe relates that he produced a translation of the *Enchiridion* while in the service of Sir J. Walshe, thus in 1522-3; see J. A. Gee, "John Byddell and the First Publication of Erasmus' *Enchiridion*", *ELH* 4 (1937): 43-59; Gee, "Tindale and the 1533 English *Enchiridion* of Erasmus", *PMLA* 49 (1934): 460-71; J. F. Mozley, "The English *Enchiridion* of Erasmus", *RES*, o. s., 20 (1944): 97-107. Already in *The obedie[n]ce of a Christen man* ([Antwerp], 1528), Tyndale would write that "The greatest cause of [the] captivitie a[n]d the decay of the fayth and this blyndnes wherein we now are/ sprang first of allehories. For Origen and the [sic] of his tyme drew all the scripture vnto allegories", while "The literall sense is become nothi[n]ge at all. For the pope hath take[n] it cleane awaye a[n]d made it his possession" (R1r-v, R4v-5r). In the *Disputatiuncula* Erasmus also insists, against Colet, that "Nothing prevents us from extracting different meanings from Holy Writ, which is a miracle of fertility, and from reading a single text in more than a single way"; *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto, 1974-), 70: 16.

the perils involved in drawing in any categorical opposition between allegory and philology in this period, and especially in expanding this opposition into accounts of how the “medieval” allegorical tradition gradually gives way to the more enlightened ways of “Renaissance” philology.<sup>80</sup>

Particularly relevant are Erasmus’s recommendations of allegory appearing in explicitly educational contexts. In the *Enchiridion* (1503) he welcomes the study of pagan literature as preparatory to the study of Scripture, and draws a parallel between the allegorical interpretation of the two.<sup>81</sup> In *On the Method of Study* (1511) he gives a model of how a grammar school teacher should expound an author to his pupils, the final and highest degree of exposition being that of moral examples and allegories.<sup>82</sup> In *A Declamation on the Subject of Early Liberal Education for Children* (1529), he still holds to this opinion, recommending the teaching of allegorical interpretation even at the youngest age.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps most

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<sup>80</sup> In *The Conflict of Thalia and Barbarism*, an early dialogue which is not included in the *Collected Works* edition of the *Colloquies*, and has still not appeared in the series, Erasmus actually reverses this scheme. The Muses Thalia, Calliope, and Melpomene, representing the new learning of the humanists, are approached by their “only and most cruel Adversary”, the monster Barbarism, with the face of a virgin and the body of an ass, representing the old learning of the scholastics; see *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, ed. E. Johnson (London, 1878), 2: 347. A quarrel begins and before long Barbarism turns on the poets: they are “the chief Thing [the Muses] have to boast of”, but the monster cannot think of anything “so empty of Goodness as your Poems; for what are they but gilded Lies, full of old Womens Tales?” (2: 352). Thalia laughs at this impudence, explaining that the poets “think it unfit to cast Roses before Swine in Mire and Dirt; and therefore they wrap up and hide the Truth in ambiguous Words and enigmatical expressions; that tho’ all may read them, yet all may not understand them” (2: 352-3). The whole conflict turns out to be exclusively about poetry and how it is to be properly written and understood, with the Muses advocating the allegorical and Barbarism the literal approach, as truth is not to be mingled with lies. Greenfield, it will be remembered, reaches the exact same conclusion in her analysis of “humanist” and “scholastic” poetics in late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy.

<sup>81</sup> Erasmus, *Enchiridion*, B5v-6r: “But as the scripture is not moche fruitful yf thou stande & sticke styll in the letter. In lyke maner the poetry of Homere and Uirgyl shall not [pro]fyte a lytell / yf thou remembre that it must be vnderstande in the sence allegory / whiche thyng no man wyll denye that hath assayed or tasted of the lernyng of olde antiquitees neuer so lytell”. He then goes on to contrast such allegorical poets with “the poetes which wryte vnclenly”, counselling the reader “not ones to touche them / or at the leestway not to loke farre in them: except thou can the better abhorre vices whan they be described to the / & in co[m]paracions of fylthy thynges the more feruently loue thyngs honest” (B6r).

<sup>82</sup> “Finally he should turn to philosophy and skilfully bring out the moral implication of the poets’ stories, or employ them as patterns” (*Works*, 24: 683). The two illustrations – “the story of Pylades and Orestes to show the excellence of friendship; that of Tantalus the curse of avarice” – seem to tend towards the example more than allegory proper, but the latter is undoubtedly included. Erasmus goes on to recommend the heavily allegorical Homeric commentary of Eustathius as a resource to help the teacher in this respect, and then himself shows at length how to turn a problematic text such as Virgil’s second eclogue into “a symbolic picture of [...] an ill-formed friendship”. The teacher can also make the training in “topics” more interesting by having his pupils discuss, among other things, the simpler sort of allegorical “fables” – “for example: Hercules won immortality for himself by vanquishing monsters; or the Muses take special delight in springs and groves and shun the smoky cities” (24: 676).

<sup>83</sup> A translation appeared as an appendix to R. Sherry, *A treatise of Schemes & Tropes* (London, [1550]), N6r: “What is more delectable then the fabels of poetes, which wyth their swete entisyng plesures so delight

importantly, allegory, both as a compositional and hermeneutical method, is an integral element of the programme of rhetorical proficiency outlined in Erasmus' exceptionally influential *De copia* (1512). Already in his treatment of allegory as a trope, Erasmus departs from classical authorities in viewing the extension of allegory into enigma not as a vice, but as a legitimate and even desirable use of the figure: "This is no bad thing if you are speaking or writing for an educated audience, and even if you are writing for the general public, for one should not write so that everyone can understand everything, but so that people should be compelled to investigate and learn some things themselves".<sup>84</sup> Later on, the pupils are

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childrens eares that thei profite vs very much whe[n] we be olde also, not only to [the] knowledge of the tong, but also to iudgement and cōpye of elegant speche? What wyll a chyld hear more gladlie then Esops fabels, whyche in sporte and playe teach earnest preceptes of philosophy? and the same fruite is also in the fabels of other poetes. The chylde heareth that Ulisses felowes were turned into swyne, and other fashions of beastes. The tale is laughed at, and yet for al that he lerneth that thing that is the chiefest poynte in al morall philosophye: Those whyche be not gouerned by ryght reason, but are caried after the wyll of affecciōns, not to be men, but beastes." Sherry explicitly upholds allegory as an essential part of rhetorical learning, specifying that he omits it only for convenience and not because he is ignorant of the fact that rhetoric "much helpeth bothe to persuasions and cōpye, the proper handling of tales taken oute of the nature of beastes, dreames, fayned narracions, sumwhat lyke vnto the truth, [with] allegories much vsed of diuines" (F8v). His model here is clearly *De copia*, the first part of which treats of the matter comprised in Sherry's *Treatise*, while the second part comprises the matter he strategically omits here.

<sup>84</sup> *Works*, 24: 336. One kind of evidence for the influence of these passages in *De copia* is the fact that we find them directly echoed in the works of English critics. Lodge, for example, is almost certainly paraphrasing this precise passage, and in a precisely "copious" way, in castigating his opponent Gosson: "[M]ust men write that you maye know theyr meaning? [...] Alas simple *Irus*, begg at knowledge gate awhile, thou haste not wonne the mastery of learning" ("Reply", A4v). This positive view of enigma is taken over in Susenbrotus' *Epitome troporum ac schematum*, the chief manual of tropes and figures, besides *De copia* itself, in Elizabethan England, where the book had a stronger and longer vogue than on the continent, especially from the 1570s onwards. L. D. Green and J. J. Murphy, *Renaissance Rhetoric Short-Title Catalogue* (Aldershot, 2006), 422, list twenty-nine editions between 1540 and 1635, of which twelve in London, the first in 1562. The prominence of allegory in Susenbrotus is worth emphasizing. He takes over the distinction between eight species of "allegory" – enigma, paroemia, irony, sarcasm, asteism, mycterism, antiphrasis, and charientism – from Melanchthon's *Institvtiones rhetoricae* (Wittenberg, 1521), C4r-D2r; trans. in J. X. Brennan, "The *Epitome troporum ac schematum* of Joannes Susenbrotus", diss. University of Illinois, 1953, 14; cf. P. Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric* (Oxford, 2011), 216-21. In his appraisal of the enigma, however, Susenbrotus follows Erasmus rather than Melanchthon: "Nor ought this device of the *enigma* be altered from this defect [i.e., obscurity] if you either speak or write for learned men; nay, not even for the rabble, so that there may be things which they will be forced to investigate and discern. In the works of the prophets and in the Apocalypse there are many *enigmas*." By contrast, Melanchthon retains the classical view of enigma as a vice – "Inter orationis uicia potius, quam ornamenta numeretur" (*Institvtiones*, D1r) – coupling it with the anti-allegorism of Protestant scriptural hermeneutics; while there are allegories and enigmas in scripture, they teach nothing for certain, and no article of doctrine is to be derived from them alone. The brief discussion in the *Institvtiones* is expanded into a seventeen-page attack on the fourfold method in Melanchthon's *Elementorvm rhetorices libri duo* [1529] (Wittenberg, 1542), G7r-H7r; German trans. by V. Wels (Berlin, 2001). There is thus a confessional element at work here, and further research should look into how treatments of allegory and enigma in post-Reformation rhetorical manuals were influenced by the Protestant-Catholic divide on principles of scriptural hermeneutics. The earlier emphasis on Susenbrotus has been qualified by Green, specifying that such treatises belonged to an advanced level of education – the higher forms of the more ambitious grammar schools and the universities – while "the foundation for studies in *elocutio*" is found in the mass-printed elementary textbooks like Lily's Grammar. See T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's Small Latine & Less Greeke* (Urbana, 1944), 2: 138-75; Brennan, "Epitome", ii-iii; L. D. Green, "Renaissance Grammar Books and *elocutio*", in "Rhetorica movet", ed. P. L.



instructed to legitimize any deployment of examples drawn from the sphere of poetic fiction by prefacing it with the claim that these were invented to transmit allegorical meanings by “those wise men of long ago”, and have enjoyed “general consent for so many centuries” – arguments dutifully repeated by the majority of the treatises on poetry discussed later in this chapter.<sup>85</sup> Finally, one should provide these allegorical meanings, and in illustrating how this is to be done Erasmus gives a brief but complete exposition of the allegorical doctrine, recommending Eustathius’ commentaries on Homer for further reading.<sup>86</sup> The structure of this passage on allegory – exposition of the theory, illustration by several examples, the statement that further examples are superfluous given the common knowledge of such matters and/or the availability of further sources – is reflected in similar passages found in several sixteenth-century treatises.<sup>87</sup>

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Oesterreich and T. O. Sloane (Leiden, 1999), esp. 105-10; Mack, *History*, 221. Green’s larger claims here – that the textbooks “taught *elocutio* to the masses” on a “sophisticated” level, and this widespread rhetorical proficiency is the actual cause of their patronage of the popular stage (74, 115) – seem unsubstantiated by his discussion, which deals solely with the so-called “figures of construction”: Latin syntactic constructions arranged into classes traditionally dubbed *figurae* or *schemata*. Green’s argument hangs on a conflation of these syntactic “figures” with rhetorical figures proper; he professes to wonder whether “the two can be separated at all” (115), yet has no difficulty in distinguishing, for example, between synecdoche as a “figure of construction” and the trope “commonly understood” by that term “in rhetorical *elocutio*” (101).

<sup>85</sup> *Works*, 24:160. For a particularly straightforward appropriation, see the section “Of enlargynge examples by cōpye” in Wilson’s *Arte of Rhetorique*: “The sayinge of Poets and all their fables are not to be forgotten, for by them we may talke at large, and winne me[n] by perswasion, if wee declare before hande, that these tales were not fayned of such wise menne without cause, neither yet continued vntyll this tyme, and kepte in memorie without good consideration, and thereupon declare the true meanyng of all suche writinge. For vndoubtedlye there is no one tale emonge al the Poetes, but vnder the same is comprehended some thinge that perteyneth eyther to the amendemente of maners, to the knowledge of trueth, to the setyng forthe of Natures woorkke, or elles to the vnderstandinge of some notable thyng done” (Cc4r). There follow examples of such allegorical readings of several classical stories, as well as the legends of St Christopher and St George, even though their depiction in churches is dismissed as a papist idolatry. “I could talke more largely of examples, & heape a nomber here together, aswell of Ethnike Authours, as of other here at home: but for feare I should be tedious, these for this tyme shal suffice” (Dd1v). Wilson also includes a translation of Erasmus’s *Epistle to perswade a young ientleman to Mariage*, in which the myth of the Giants is interpreted as signifying “that certaine fierce and sauage menne, such as were vnknown, coulde not abide wedlocke for anye worldes good”, while the myth of Orpheus means “nothings else, but that a wise and well spoken manne, did call backe harde harted menne, suche as liued abroade like Beastes, from open whoredome, and brought them to lyue after the mooste holye lawes of Matrimonye” (G2r).

<sup>86</sup> “Although the principle of the allegory or hidden meaning is not equally obvious in every case, experts in antiquity are agreed that under all the inventions of the ancient poets there does lie a hidden meaning, whether historical [...]; or theological [...]; or physical [...]; or moral [...]. Quite often there is a mixture of more than one type of allegory” (*Works*, 24: 610-13). By “historical” allegory is meant the sort of mythographical rationalization most commonly associated with Palaephatus’ *On Unbelievable Tales*, although the example used by Erasmus is from Diodorus: see *Diodorus of Sicily* (London, 1933-67), 2: 457-8.

<sup>87</sup> Besides Wilson, see R. Wills [Willes], *De re poetica*, ed. A. D. S. Fowler (Oxford, 1958), 121; H. Dethick, *Oratio in laudem poëseos*, in *Latin Treatises on Poetry from Renaissance England*, ed. J. W. Binns (Signal Mountain, 1999), 43; Ariosto, *Orlando*, trans. Harington, ¶4v.

If in Erasmus we can see a precursor for the allegorical tendency in English poetics, we can see a precursor for the other, literalist tendency in the view of his younger contemporary and correspondent Juan Luis Vives. Like Erasmus, Vives was a scholar of international renown; like Erasmus, he was particularly concerned with educational reform; like Erasmus, he had direct contact with English literary and intellectual culture during his sojourns in England in the 1520s, including a short-lived rhetoric lectureship at Oxford. Unlike Erasmus, however, Vives displays a much more negative, and in some cases outspokenly hostile, view on the question of allegory in secular literature. In *De disciplinis*, an extensive plan for reform of learning usually regarded as his greatest work, Vives embarks on a vehement censure of what he perceives as the abuse of poetry, rehearsing many of the arguments that would later be attributed to the poet-haters.<sup>88</sup> Poets are liars who ascribe a variety of immoral deeds not only to ordinary people but heroes and gods, thereby encouraging the same vices in their audiences, and Plato was right to banish such poets his commonwealth.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, “these recitals of lust, savagery, vaingloriousness and deceit” are all the more dangerous for being delivered “not [...] in a rude uncultivated manner, but one that is polished and ornate, so that even without the blandishments of the act itself, the very words would charm and entice men of their own accord”.<sup>90</sup> Nowhere in all this does Vives state or even imply that there is to the poets’ fictions any underlying allegorical sense, whether beneficial or reprehensible; the emphasis is solely on the powerful psychological and

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<sup>88</sup> J. L. Vives, *De disciplinis libri XX* (Antwerp, 1531). A translation of Vives’ remarks on poetry in the first part of the work, *De causis corruptarum artium*, is available in R. Stein, “A Study of Juan Luis Vives, *De causis corruptarum artium* (1531)”, diss. University of Oxford, 1952. The second part, *De tradendis disciplinis*, is translated in J. L. Vives, *On Education*, trans. F. Watson (Cambridge, 1913).

<sup>89</sup> How inadequate the labels of “attacker” and “defender” are is shown by the fact that in his commentary on Augustine’s *City of God*, first published in 1522, Vives “defends” poetry from Augustine’s strictures by the same argument that in the context of the *De disciplinis* constitutes an “attack”. Augustine takes a simplistic view of Plato’s banishment of the poets: “Is not *Plato* more praise-worthy then you all, who disputing of the true perfection of a citty would haue Poets banished from that society, as enemies to the cities full perfection?”; *St. Avgvstine, of the Citie of God: with the Learned Comments of Io. Lod. Vives* ([London], 1610), H1r. Vives’ commentary offers a more complex account, making the key distinction between the argument in Books 2-3 and Book 10: “*Plato* (*de rep. lib. 2.*) expels al Poets out of a well ordered citty, for the wickedness which they sing of the gods: & (in the tenth booke of the same worke) *Socrates* hauing spoken much against them, concludeth al in this, [that] he holds that poetry only fit to be excluded, which giues life to vnmanly affections: & that to be allowed, which is manly, & honest: So [that] he condemnes not all poetry, for sometimes he calls *Poets*, a *diuine kinde of men*, namely when they sing himmes to the Deities [...]: if they exceed not in loosenesse, nor yield to rancour nor consent vnto flattery, nor in their songs sowe seeds of corruption, such poets are profitable members in *Plato’s commonwealth*” (H1v).

<sup>90</sup> Stein, “Study”, 2: 30.

moral effect poetry produces at its face value. Furthermore, Vives' literalism is not due to the vituperative context, and is even more explicit when he takes to praising poetry – for it is not, as later critics of both factions would also repeat, the art itself that is corrupt, only the abuses to which it has been put. Singled out for praise are thus precisely the formal, rhetorical, and imaginative properties of poetry.<sup>91</sup> Subject matter plays no part in this, including Vives' explicit definition of poetry, and even the commonplace Horatian imperative of teaching and delighting is absent.<sup>92</sup> Essential to poetry are the beauty of poetic language (“harmonious agreement”), and the power of the poetic imagination (“delightful allurements”). Ideally, these are combined with wholesome subject matter: Vives' classical models, like Gosson's, are Plato's *Republic*, Cicero's *Archias*, and Plutarch's *De audiendis poetis*. In principle, however, subject matter, wholesome or unwholesome, is contingent.

At the same time, tackling the question of allegory, Vives can go so far as to deny any genuine epistemological value in the method. He discusses the subject in a short early work entitled *Painted Truth*: Truth, a maiden of unsurpassable natural beauty and sometime companion of Aristotle, is made to wear hideous make-up by the poets, who “wish neither to say nor hear anything without mixing it with lies”.<sup>93</sup> “[D]isfigured and crying out in protest”, Painted Truth – an anti-allegorical personification of allegory – calls the students of the University of Paris to return to “pure, unalloyed and simple truth”, and follow Plato's precedent in banishing poetry from their studies.<sup>94</sup> In *De disciplinis* Vives is more

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<sup>91</sup> Verse is “very charming because of its harmony, which corresponds with the melody of the human soul” (*Education*, 126). Poetic diction is “lofty, sublime, brilliant”, and furthermore, “poems contain subjects of extraordinary effectiveness, and they display human passions in a wonderful and vivid manner. This is called *energia*. There breathes in them a certain great and lofty spirit so that the readers are themselves caught into it, and seem to rise above their own intellect, and even above their own nature.”

<sup>92</sup> Stein, “Study”, 2: 26: “Poetry is speech bound by certain fixed laws of rhythm, in which there is not only a binding together of feet, but also a rhythm, and a kind of harmonious agreement, delighting the ears and soothing the spirits of listeners. This charm was called for, so that, should they wish to impress anything more deeply in the breasts of their hearers, and engrave it more firmly upon their memories, they might easily do so by means of this delightful allurements; for we are more willing to admit such pleasant things into our mind, and we find it easier to recollect them when they are linked together by a rhythmical connection.”

<sup>93</sup> J. L. Vives, *Early Writings*, ed. C. Matheeußen *et al.* (Leiden, 1987-91), 1: 79. Note that the views of Vives' Truth are thus identical to those of Erasmus' Barbarism.

<sup>94</sup> “The songs of the poets are the food of demons, said my beloved Jerome, that is, those poets who have learned to lie themselves and teach others to do so. Their standard-bearer, as Dio of Prusa said, is that blind and insane old man, Homer, whose delight in lying is proved by the fact that he gives a leading role to that favorite of his, the wandering Ulysses, the paragon of lies and falsehood” (*ibid.*). This is the earlier of the two works by Vives which bear the same title, first published in 1514. The later dramatic dialogue, published in 1523 and

straightforward: some interpreters of the poets “stretch their fables to fit some natural interpretation, as do the Stoics, others to fit a moral one, but all the Greek, Roman and barbarous histories can be twisted in this way. They give their words interpretations which the authors themselves never intended”.<sup>95</sup> Donatus’ interpretations of Terence, Landino’s of Virgil, and the various ancient Greek allegorical readings of Homer are offered as examples. The method is epistemologically bankrupt, even though it does have some pragmatic value in pedagogy and government.<sup>96</sup> Poetry is admirable in theory, yet in practice its beauty and power are often misused for debased purposes. Allegory, by contrast, is reprehensible in theory, but can be allowed a limited practical role within a larger strategy of countering such abuse, a strategy comprised of bowdlerisation, “parental guidance” in approaching poetic *exempla*, rationalization, and, at the very end of the list, lowest-grade allegoresis, mentioned only with respect to the representations of pagan deities.<sup>97</sup>

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subtitled *of Poetic Licence: To What Extent Poets May Be Permitted to Vary from the Truth*, has a different framework: a treaty is negotiated between Truth, appearing in her unadulterated form, and a sumptuous and depraved Falsity, whose emissaries are Homer, Hesiod, Lucian, and Apuleius. Here Vives adopts a less stringent attitude, allowing for a number of concessions, but still avoids the allegorical approach: see the account in W. Nelson, *Fact or Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), 45-9.

<sup>95</sup> Stein, “Study”, 2: 28. In support of this, Vives cites Seneca and Plato’s *Phaedrus*, where Socrates voices his indifference to rationalist mythography of the Palaephatean variety (230a-b; *Works*, 510), which Vives obviously conflates with allegory here.

<sup>96</sup> The allegorists are said to have “very wisely translated the sayings of Homer to higher senses”, even though Homer never intended them, since in this way they “do less damage, supported as they were by the great reverence and trust of the people. How much wiser were they than the men of our time, who prefer crushing the things they see that the multitude has great faith in, to reconciling them to their own views!” (Stein, “Study”, 2: 29). The exact reference of this last remark is unclear, yet what is clear is that Vives’ acceptance of allegory is merely pragmatic. The more complex and essentially philological perspective on the problem by allegory opened by Vives’ further comments in Book 5, on history, about how the poets corrupted mankind’s earliest historical accounts (*ibid.*, 2: 39-40), compare interestingly with, and may have been an influence on, Bacon’s view of ancient myth; see further below, n. 213.

<sup>97</sup> Vives, *Education*, 128-9: “poets ought not to be excluded from boys’ study, but should be expurgated [...]. Obscene passages should be wholly cut out from the text [...]. When however poets depict the bad, let those who read know that the poems are only pictures, and impress upon them that they are pictures very often of the worst men. When they hear about gods, let them think of them as kings, when of heroes, as noblemen, and when of men, as common people.” “Sometimes”, continues Vives – not always, not if the first resort of Palaephatean rationalization suffices – the pupils “must take the god as standing for the quality which is attributed to him, for instance Jupiter for the majesty of kingship”. Even here, Vives’ impersonal language distances itself from the method: the qualities are not genuinely there, but are rather *attributed* (“attribuitur”; *De disciplinis*, second pagination, g2v), and not by him, but by common opinion. Vives’ view of allegory is reiterated in his 1532 *De ratione dicendi*: “Some stories of the poets contain natural truths, others, moral truths; both ought to be preserved. Other stories have nothing of value for life, like the hunt of the wild boar of Calydon or the sailing of the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece. There are still others which contain many positively harmful elements, having arisen from some admitted error. I think here of the stories about the Elysian fields, about the kingdom and wicked deeds of the gods, or about wicked delight in obscene matters, like adulteries, abominable crimes, wars, and barbarities”; J. F. Cooney, “*De ratione dicendi*: A Treatise on Rhetoric by Juan Luis Vives”, diss. Ohio State University, 1966, 239-40. In *The Instructio[n] of a Christen woma[n]* (London, [1529?]), E3r-

While the direct influence of Vives cannot be compared to that of Erasmus, it is at least symptomatic that the views attributed to enemies of poetry in Richard Willes' 1573 *De re poetica disputatio*, probably the earliest defence of poetry printed in England, are actually borrowed, often verbatim, from the above-cited strictures in Vives' *De disciplinis*.<sup>98</sup> The dissemination of such views between Vives and Willes is difficult to document, but they cannot have been an isolated case. Another demonstrably influential book was Agrippa's *De incertitudine*, which rehearsed much the same arguments, albeit from the unremittingly negative perspective mandated by its genre.<sup>99</sup> It also seems reasonable to suppose that the literalist view gained at least some level of currency in the educational system. The school curricula tell us much about what was taught at a given institution, but little about how it was taught. They do not tell us what a particular schoolmaster did when faced with problematic material in the poets: did he take Erasmus' advice and drag up something from the allegorical commentaries he kept at his fingers, or did he administer a literalist cocktail similar to that devised by Vives? It can hardly be doubted that Erasmus's model had real-life counterparts and that their teachings are to be glimpsed behind the prominence of the allegorical view in the defences of poetry composed by their pupils.<sup>100</sup> But even if the allegorical approach

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F2v, he opposes "vngratious bokes" (romances, collections like Poggio's *Facetiae*, unprofitable ancient poets including Homer, exiled by Plato, and Ovid, banished by Augustus) to "good bokes" (the Bible and the fathers, and of the ancients, "Plato/ Cicero/ Senec/ & suche other").

<sup>98</sup> As first noted by Fowler: see Wills, *De re poetica*, ed. Fowler, 25-9; cf. Stein, "Study", 1: 72.

<sup>99</sup> *De incertitudine* was first published in 1530 and translated into English in 1569. In the chapter on poetry, Agrippa brings the same charges as those found in Vives, coupled with the same emphasis on poetry's aesthetic and imaginative qualities: it is "the principall Authore of lies", serving "no other end, but to please the eares of foolish men, with wanton Rithmes, with measures, and weightinesse of syllables, and with a vaine iarringe of wordes, and to deceiue mens minds with the delectation of fables, and with fardels of lies"; *Of the Vanitie and vncertaintie of Artes and Sciences* (London, 1569), D3r-v. There is also the same, albeit implicit, rejection of the possibility of allegorical reading: an extended catalogue of mythological "fables" is simply dismissed as "notable lies", delivered, again, "with the venemous eloquence of wordes, and with pestiferous pleasauntnesse of verse". The Latin original was current in the mid-sixteenth century: the *Private Libraries of Renaissance England* database lists eleven copies, all but one in the inventories of Oxford scholars, most dating from the 1570s. Could this be any indication of the background against which H. Dethick's oration in defence of poetry, delivered at Oxford sometime between the later 1560s and 1572, is to be viewed? Did the two editions of the English translation (1569, 1575) make Agrippa's censure of poetry additionally provoking? And did Agrippa's readers always understand the satirical nature of his work? Harington apparently does not recognize it, or more likely pretends not to recognize it, when he takes from Agrippa his "chiefe obiections" against poetry; see Ariosto, *Orlando*, trans. Harington, ¶3v. Presumably other sixteenth-century readers acknowledged the satire but still mined Agrippa's chapter for arguments against poetry. Sidney for one realizes that "Agrippa will be as merry in showing the vanity of science as Erasmus was in the commending of folly", and that these are merely "smiling railers", who "had another foundation than the superficial part would promise" (*Defence*, 100).

<sup>100</sup> Dethick and Willes, who both award an important place to allegory in their treatises, both studied at Winchester College under C. Johnson, a schoolmaster who was himself a Latin poet, who emphasized poetry in

prevailed in the schools, the situation at the universities would appear to have been less uniform. Gosson and Lodge, whose polemic is further discussed below, offer an example of how two contemporaries, who both went to Oxford at almost the same time, were shaped by their university experience in ways that made them dire opponents in this respect.<sup>101</sup>

Further investigation along these lines would probably enrich our understanding of this crucial stage in the development of the debate. What is clear, however, is that in its earliest printed attestations, the academic orations of Willes and Dethick, this debate is not concerned with the broad-ranging outcry, “Puritan” or otherwise, over popular literature and the popular stage in particular.<sup>102</sup> It is the summit of Parnassus that is supposedly under siege, not its expendable lower ranges. What is also striking is the vagueness with which the defenders of poetry refer to their supposed opponents, which cannot be ascribed wholly to the

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his curriculum, and who presumably approved of their views for he contributed verses to both their publications; see Willes, *De re poetica*, ed. Fowler, 4-5; Dethick, *Oratio*, 22-3. Spenser, the author of a lost but in all probability thoroughly pro-allegorical *English Poete*, studied at Merchant Taylors’ under R. Mulcaster, who is on record as listing allegory as the defining quality of poetic discourse. See R. Mulcaster, *Positions Concerning the Training Up of Children*, ed. W. Barker (Toronto, 1994), 266: “For when the *poetes* write sadly and soberly, without counterfeiting though they write in verse, yet they be no *poetes* in that kinde of their writing: but where they cover a truth with a fabulous veele, and resemble with alteration.”

<sup>101</sup> It is also striking that the treatises of Willes and Dethick – the earliest comprehensive defences of poetry in England, predating Gosson’s *Schoole* by several years – are both formal Latin orations of the kind that would have been required in university exercises, and that Dethick’s treatise in fact is such an oration, delivered in the course of his B.A. or M.A. examinations. This is a particularly important piece of information given the fact that such orations were delivered on prescribed themes, and that they would have also been answered by other students acting as opponents. Did the debate which emerges into public view with Gosson, Lodge and Sidney originate in such academic contexts? Was the question of poetry a *quaestio* in the technical sense, a set topic on which the students argued *pro* and *contra*, as they did with other similar topics? The Latin treatises were a late addition to the corpus. In 1940 appeared the first edition of Dethick’s *Oratio*, in the version misattributed to Rainolds, but with an excellent and still valuable commentary by Ringler: see J. Rainolds [i.e., H. Dethick], *Oratio in Laudem Artis Poeticae*, ed. W. Ringler (Princeton, 1940). There followed in 1958 Fowler’s edition of Willes – a note on Willes had appeared in *Essays*, ed. Smith, 1: 46-7, n. 1 – and then Binns’ editions of Gentili, the correctly attributed version of Dethick’s treatise, and Dalechamp: see J. W. Binns, “Alberico Gentili in Defense of Poetry and Acting”, *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972): 224-72; “Henry Dethick in Praise of Poetry”, *Library* 30 (1975): 199-216; *Treatises*, ed. Binns. Binns also brought to attention the English editions of Buchler’s abridgment of Pontanus and Strada’s *Prolusiones*; see *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England*, ed. J. W. Binns (Leeds, 1990), 153-9. On Dethick’s oration, see *Treatises*, ed. Binns, 4-5, where the oration itself is dated to no later than 14 July 1572, while its publication – the edition is undated – is placed between 1572 and 1576. At the beginning, Dethick explicitly addresses an “audience” of “most excellent young men”, who will either “enter upon the same trials” that he is now entering, “or else have already undergone” them (*ibid.*, 27-9). The disputations involved in B.A. and M.A. degrees are described in the *Register of the University of Oxford*, ed. C. W. Boase and A. Clark (Oxford, 1885-87), 2.1: 8-88. The lists of topics include “Literati potius exoptandi sunt in republica quam armati”, “An critici e republica literaria sint expellendi?”, “Criticorum laborum est occupatissima vanitas” (*ibid.*, 2.1: 173, 175, 178).

<sup>102</sup> As Fowler noted long ago: “we must at least hesitate before turning to the customary scape-goats, the Puritans, as early as 1573. After all, the *calumniae* were not borrowed from any Puritan, but from Vives – a Papist and a Humanist. And this is the true reflection of the state of affairs in the earlier Elizabethan period: the reasons for attacking poetry were mostly Humanistic or ascetic, not Protestant and Calvinist” (38).

principle of *nomina sunt odiosa*. Thus we know that Willes adapts these charges from Vives, but Vives is never named – instead, Willes strikes out at “certain men”, “enemies of the Muses”, “these obscure men”, “churlish [...] calumniators of the art of poetry”.<sup>103</sup> But who are these “evidently barbarous” and “completely ignorant” philistines? Even after Gosson’s *Schoole* – with the unrepresentative exception of Lodge – defenders of poetry continue to refer to their opponents in this indirect manner, yet it proves impossible to find statements denouncing poetry in the wholesale manner that the defenders undertake to refute.<sup>104</sup> The most probable reason for this is that, except as a polemical construct, these indiscriminating poet-haters never existed.

In its polemical content, the defenders’ view is genuine, for what is really at stake for them is the allegorical view of literature. This is why Willes and all the defenders of poetry following in his train consistently omit any mention of the critiques of allegory found in Vives and later in Gosson, or in any other source. They award a prominent place to allegory in their treatises, but only as a counter-argument to the charge of lying or “feigning”, and never in terms of a debate between an anti- and a pro-allegorical position.<sup>105</sup> It is the one issue that really matters and where genuine disagreement exists, and therefore the one issue they refuse to openly debate. Willes’ editor must have suspected the implications of this omission when

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<sup>103</sup> *De re poetica*, ed. Fowler, 45-7.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Sidney, *Defence*, 99-100: “poet-haters”, “fools”, “these other pleasant fault-finders”; Ariosto, *Orlando*, ed. Harington, ¶2v: “the ignorant”, “three sundrie kindes of reproouers”, “our adversaries”, “we liue in such a time, in which nothing can escape the enuious tooth, and backbiting tongue of an impure mouth; and wherein euerie blind corner hath a squint eyes *Zoilus*, that can looke a right ypon no mans doings squint-eye *Zoilus*” of “envious tooth and backbiting tongue”, etc. Lodge is not representative because he is writing to order, against a particular author and publication. In the *Apologie* Gosson notes that “It is told mee that they [i.e. the players] haue got one in London to write certaine *Honest excuses*, for so they tearme it, to their dishonest abuses which I reuealed” (M2v). All the evidence suggests that this was Lodge, who was thus expressly hired to write a confutation of the *Schoole of Abuse* rather than a general defence of poetry.

<sup>105</sup> The single exception, in Dethick’s *Oratio*, is telling. Willes’ treatise anticipates Sidney’s *Defence* in being cast in the form of a judicial oration: Willes is defending poetry and thus has to refer to the prosecuting party in one way or another, so he introduces the construct of the poet-hater, based on the material in Vives. Dethick’s oration, however, is laudatory, so that a polemical context is not as prominent, and indeed we hear nothing of the existence of any quarrel on poetry until Dethick reaches the point where the allegorical conception of poetic meaning is to be introduced. Here the serenity of the panegyric mood is briefly eclipsed as Dethick cannot forbear from mentioning that the allegorical view of literature is contested by “some unlearned and inept little men” (43). He then returns to this abuse in the final sentence of his oration: “The man who does not see this” – i.e., the greatness of poetry, of which allegory is an essential component – “is a fool; the man who does not acknowledge this is envious; the man who does not embrace this knowledge ought to be called a madman” (49). Just like in the Gosson-Lodge debate discussed below, the denial of the validity of allegorical poetics is tantamount to a confession of cultural illiteracy.

he urged that “No conclusions can be drawn from Wills’s failure to use Vives’ penetrating censure of allegory” in *De disciplinis*.<sup>106</sup> As should be clear, there is, on the contrary, every conclusion to be drawn from it, and indeed it is this omission that explains the otherwise insubstantial construct of the poet-hater. To Willes and many of his contemporaries allegory was the very essence of poetry, and to attack allegory is to attack poetry itself.

What Gosson’s *Schoole of Abuse* represented upon its publication in 1579, then, was a particularly potent combination of tradition and novelty. His view of poetry was thoroughly traditional and thoroughly humanist: there is virtually nothing that Gosson says about poetry that could not be derived from Cicero alone. The novelty was to bring this view into the public arena, in fashionable vernacular prose, employing only classical sources, and aligning it with the censure of the public stage, supported by the civic authorities which also stood behind the publication of Gosson’s pamphlet.<sup>107</sup> The *Schoole* stuck in the throats of men like Lodge and Sidney precisely because it was *not* “Puritan” – because it flashed the credentials of their own humanist culture, and called upon arguments and authorities they were bound to find compelling. In fundamentals, Gosson’s argument exactly replicates that of Vives: “The right vse of auncient Poetrie was too haue the notable exploytes of worthy Captaines, the wholesome counceles of good fathers, and vertuous liues of predecessors set downe in numbers”.<sup>108</sup> However, poetry is often abused and we are right to follow Plato in banishing abusive poets from the commonwealth. The possibility of an allegorical defence of these abuses is categorically dismissed, and almost two pages are devoted to exemplifying and ridiculing the allegorical readings of Homer by Maximus of Tyre.<sup>109</sup> Gosson repeats these charges with gusto in the *Apologie for the Schoole of Abuse* later in the same year, where he

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<sup>106</sup> *De re poetica*, ed. Fowler, 35, n. 3.

<sup>107</sup> On the circumstances of its publications see Ringler, *Gosson*, 26-8, and Gosson, *Markets*, 17, n. 40.

<sup>108</sup> *The Schoole of Abuse* (London, 1579), A7v. Nor is Gosson against all plays: “as some of the Players are farre from abuse: so some of their Playes are without rebuke” (C6v). In the *Apologie for the Schoole of Abuse*, Gosson explicitly rejects his opponents’ imputations that “I banishe Poetrie, wherein they dreame; [...] that I condemne Musique, wherein they dote; [...] that I forbid recreation to man, wherein you may see, they are starke blinde. He that readeth with aduise the booke which I wrote, shal preceiue that I touch but the abuses of all these” (*Ephemerides*, L2v).

<sup>109</sup> “It is a Pageant worth the sight, to beholde how he labors w[ith] Mountaines to bring foorth Mise [...]. You will smile I am sure if you read it, to see how this morall Philosopher toyles too draw the Lyons skin vpon *Æsops* Asse, *Hercules* shoes on a childees feete, amplyfying that which the more it is stirred, the more it stinkes; the lesse it is talked of, the better it is liked” (*Schoole*, A3r-v).



brings out an abusive catalogue of pagan deities similar to those in Vives and Agrippa – Venus is a “notorious strumpet”, Apollo a “buggerer”, etc. – and reiterates his position that such representations are inadmissible, whether allegorical or not:

By writing of vntruthes they [i.e. the poets who write of the gods] are open liers, but if they do faine these frantike conceates to resemble somewhat els that they imagine, by speaking of one thing and thinking another, they are dissemblers. [...] yet are many of their Schollers so enchaunted, that like the superstitious and foolish *Ægyptians*, they had rather lose their lyues, then the Idols of their byrdes, their beastes, their *Ibes*, their Adders, their Dogges, their Cattes, their Serpentes, their Crocodiles.<sup>110</sup>

It is Gosson’s attention to poetry, then, and in particular this dismissal of allegory, that made his pamphlet impossible to ignore; in attacking allegory, as Lodge’s reply makes clear, Gosson is attacking much more than it may at first appear.

Even though Lodge appears to have been hired to write against Gosson by representatives of the theatre, his genuine interest lies not with what the *Schoole* says about the stage, much of which he agrees with anyway, but with what it says about poetry. The bulk of his “patchte pamphlet”, as Gosson rightly calls it, is taken over from a commentary on Terence by Badius first printed in 1502, but the few opening pages are Lodge’s own, and here it is the charges against poetry that concern him, in answering which his first and fundamental counter-argument is precisely that of allegory.<sup>111</sup> “Did you neuer reader reade”, he asks his “ouer wittie frend”, “that vnder the persons of beastes many abuses were dissiphered? haue you not reason to waye? that whatsoeuer ether *Virgil* did write of his gnat, or *Ouid* of his fley: was all couertly to declare abuse? but you are (*homo literatus*) a man of the letter little sauoring of learning”.<sup>112</sup> Lodge’s punning insult precisely encapsulates the debate: for him, as for many of his contemporaries, to be a *homo literatus*, man of letters, is precisely *not* to be a “man of the letter”. He wonders whether Gosson had

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<sup>110</sup> *Ephemerides*, L5r.

<sup>111</sup> See S. Gosson, *Plays Confuted in five Actions* (London, [1582]), B4v; W. Ringler, “The Source of Lodge’s *Reply to Gosson*”, *RES* 15, o. s., (1939): 164–71.

<sup>112</sup> “Reply”, A2r.

dronke perhaps of *Lethe*, your gramer learning is out of your head, you forget your Accidence, your reme[m]ber not, that vnder the person of *Aeneas* in *Virgil* the practice of a diligent captain is discribed vnder [the] shadow of byrds, beastes and trees, the follies of the world were disiphered, you know not, that the creation is signified in the Image of *Prometheus*, the fall of pryde in the person of *Narcissus*, these are toyes because they sauor of wisdom which you want.<sup>113</sup>

Acquired at the formative schoolboy age, allegory is as much a part of elementary education as Latin “Accidence” itself, a common cultural possession of anyone who aspires to the status of a *homo literatus*. Lodge does not debate Gosson’s views, but simply piles further examples of allegorical interpretation, juxtaposed with further doubts about Gosson’s cultural literacy. Clearly he believes that they speak for themselves, and that denying their validity is tantamount to saying that “our studientes [*sic*] [...] haue made shipwrack of theyr labors, our schoolemaisters haue so offended that by your iudgement they shall *subire pœnam capitis* for teaching poetry, the vniuersitie is litle beholding to you, al their practices in teaching are friuolous”.<sup>114</sup>

But Gosson has not forgotten his “gramer learning”, and in fact that is precisely the problem. Had Gosson really been a mere philistine his pamphlet would have been easily ignored.<sup>115</sup> Instead, Gosson actually anticipates Lodge’s criticism in a tantalizingly evasive passage which almost explicitly extends the metaphor of the “school of abuse” to his own King’s School in Canterbury. He himself, as he says, has “matriculated” in this “school, where so many abuses flourish”, and could tell such “tales out of the Schoole” that he would

bee Ferruled for my faulte, or hissed at for a blab, yf I layde al the orders open before your eyes. You are no sooner entred, but libertie looseth the reynes, and geues you head, placing you with Poetrie in the lowest forme: when his skill is showne too make

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., A2r-v.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., A3r-v.

<sup>115</sup> It is telling that Sidney, in what seems to be a reference to Gosson’s *Schoole*, says that the objections of the more frivolous kind of “poet-haters” – “these other pleasant fault-finders” – “deserve no other answer, but, instead of laughing at the jest, to laugh at the jester” (*Defence*, 99-100), and yet he goes on to answer them anyway. Gosson’s *Schoole* was presented on its title-page as a *plesant inuectiue*; a few sentences further Sidney also employs the phrase “nurse of abuse” (101) in recounting the calumnies against poetry.

his Scholer as good as euer twangde, hee preferres you too Pyping, from Pyping to playing, from play to pleasure, from pleasure to slouth, from slouth too sleepe, from sleepe too sinne, from sinne to death, from death to the deuill, if you take your learning apace, and passe through euery forme without reuolting.<sup>116</sup>

The key word being “reuolting”: Gosson is consciously and explicitly revolting against a major aspect of his education, and more broadly, a major element in the dominant literary culture of his age. He is doing this, however, in a way that would not have been possible without the benefits of this education, “beat[ing]” his enemies “from their holdes with their owne weapons”.<sup>117</sup> Consequently, his pamphlet elicits responses where others are ignored, driving men like Lodge and Sidney to formulate statements of poetic theory which affirm what Gosson denies, namely that allegory is “gramer learning”, an essential requirement of basic cultural literacy. In the words of Hawes’ *Lady Grammar*, some three quarters of a century earlier,

gramer is the first foundement  
Of every science to have construccyon:  
Who knewe gramer without impediment  
Shoulde perfyte have intellection  
Of a lytterall cense and moralyzacion  
To construe every thyng ententiefly,  
The worde is gramer wel and ordinatly.<sup>118</sup>

#### COMPREHENSIVE STATEMENTS, 1570-1630

In the background of the Gosson-Lodge polemic, and of the post-1570 explosion of poetic theorizing in England in general, there seem to be two distinct, partly complementary and partly opposing tendencies: both were humanist, both had a footing in the educational system,

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<sup>116</sup> *Schoole*, A6v-A7r.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, D1r.

<sup>118</sup> *Pastime*, l. 24. On allegoresis as an essential component of the discipline of grammar up to the twelfth century, see M. Irvine, *The Making of Literary Culture* (Cambridge, 1994), esp. the two chapters on *enarratio*.

both claimed the same authorities, both agreed on the moral end of poetry, both attacked only what they perceived as bad and defended what they perceived as good literature. The only question in which they genuinely differed was that of the more fabulous or otherwise offensive reaches of the poetic imagination, and consequently, on the question of what validity is to be awarded to the doctrine of allegory. It is against this background that we can now take a fresh look at the place of allegory in the established canon of English “Renaissance” poetics, surveying those documents which contain reasonably complete statements of poetic theory.<sup>119</sup> What we find is that works fitting this description produced or published in England c.1570-1630, a corpus of some twelve major documents, tend to present allegory as a defining feature of all good imaginative literature, or at least of particular literary genres.

To begin with, such is the case with the earliest comprehensive treatises on poetry to survive from sixteenth-century England, the Latin academic orations of Willes and Dethick,

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. Weinberg’s category of the “new arts of poetry” (*History*, 715). It is only such works that lend themselves to an analysis of any statistical interest, for it is only in them that the absence of allegorical poetics may be plausibly taken to reflect a genuine rejection of the doctrine. For “established canon” read the section on “English and Neo-Latin Poetics” in Plett’s *Bibliography*, 217-37, which is the most complete to date, although far from exhaustive; except for Jonson’s prefaces, it includes only specialized prose treatises, and it does not cross-reference this section with that on rhetoric. The section “English and Neo-Latin Poetics” lists thirteen works written and/or published in England between c.1572 and 1651. Nine of these fit the category of attempting comprehensive theories of poetry and are discussed below (the remaining four are Heinsius’ *De constitutione tragoediae liber*, James I’s *Treatise*, Webbe’s *Discourse*, and Temple’s analysis of Sidney’s *Defence*). To these nine I have added the treatises of Gentili, Scott, and Dalechamp, and Harington’s “Of reeding poetry”. These are all omitted by Plett even though they obviously fit the category, as are F. Bacon’s writings on the subject, discussed in the final section of this chapter. Plett’s *Bibliography* offers further testimony to the conceptual and periodisational inconsistencies discussed above. In the Introduction, “The chronological spectrum of the English Renaissance is defined as extending from 1479, the year of the first rhetoric printed in England, to 1660, the beginning of the restoration” (1). Thus the earliest work of English Renaissance poetics dates from almost a century later than the period is supposed to begin. In a 1933 article, A. Nicoll briefly discusses a manuscript text by K. Digby, known to historians of criticism for his two pieces on Spenser, which he describes as an “important [...] document in the history of criticism”, but fails to provide any sort of reference for this text, and makes other misleading statements about; see A. Nicoll, “Sir Kenelm Digby”, *The Johns Hopkins Alumni Magazine* 21 (1933): 330-50, pp. 345-6. Drawing on Nicoll, Tayler further confuses the matter by describing it as a “manuscript [...] treatise [...] on the nature of poetry in general”; see *Literary Criticism in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. E. W. Tayler (New York, 1967), 202. I have been able to locate this text, still virtually unknown to scholarship on early modern criticism, as the tenth item (fol. 61r-75v) in Harley MS 4153, a miscellany of Digby’s writings professionally transcribed no earlier than 1657. The 4,300-word letter, which probably dates from around 1640, is not a comprehensive treatise on poetics, yet it is a sustained discussion on the subject, and thus an important addition to the corpus of seventeenth-century English criticism. Following a preliminary presentation on the text at the 6th Biennial Conference of the Society for Renaissance Studies, University of Southampton, 13-15 July 2014, I am now preparing an edition with an introductory essay and essential commentary. Finally, on the “*Commendation of true poetry. A Discommendation of all bawdy Rybald and paganizde poetes*”, supposedly excerpted by its anonymous author in the Epistle to his *First Book of the Preservation of King Henry the vij.* (London, 1599), see pp. 103-04 below.

already discussed above. In his 1573 *De re poetica disputatio*, Willes distinguishes between mere “versifiers” and true poets – “those, that is, who invented as if by a loftier spirit things which to others remained hidden (for the Muses get their name from *μύεσθαι*, to have their eyes closed, and from *μαιώσθαι*, to deliver); those Plato calls poets, ‘the Interpreters and servitors of the gods’”.<sup>120</sup> More explicitly, allegory is also Willes’ chief answer to the key charge of lying:

whatever poets feign, at least they do so in a way that they teach what is profitable and what is not. For example, trees were stirred by the song of Orpheus: that is, rustics and ignorant men are delighted by poetry. So with Actaeon changed into a stag and devoured by dogs: that is, a spendthrift wastes his riches most if he supports his favourites.<sup>121</sup>

“It would be tedious”, adds Willes, “to go through each one”, i.e., to allegorize each of the fables in this manner, clearly expecting his reader to already know and agree that such allegories are to be found in all poetic “feignings”.

Around the same time, a fuller exposition of the allegorical theory, illustrated with a wider selection of examples, but identical in essentials, is given in Dethick’s *Oratio in laudem poëseos*.<sup>122</sup> Poetry owes its origins to ancient sages who wished to bequeath their learning to posterity in a form that would reach worthy audiences but escape “the impure hands of the mob”. It is defined as the expression of wise and noble “thoughts” in a medium characterized by “the festive seemliness of meter, [...] bound by the melodious composition of harmonies, [and] entwined [...] around in the lurking retreats of darkness, clothed as it were with certain coverings of stories”. In illustration, Dethick interprets a number of classical fables as either “delineating the difficult and craggy pathway of uprightness”, or else “demonstrating the foul

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<sup>120</sup> *De re poetica*, 59. “Poet”, reads the marginal note set against these lines, emphasizing that the definition of poetry is being given. The passage is a patchwork of two separate places in the first book of Scaliger’s *Poetices libri* and a third – the etymology given for the Muses – for which I have not been able to identify source; see J. C. Scaliger, *Poetices libri septem*, ed. L. Deitz and G. Vogt-Spira (Stuttgart, 1994-2011), 1: 72, 82; trans. in *Select Translations from Scaliger’s Poetics* (New York, 1905), 9, 14. As found in their original contexts, the passages adapted from Scaliger have nothing to do with allegory.

<sup>121</sup> *De re poetica*, 121. The standard Horatian allegoresis of Orpheus and Amphion is repeated elsewhere in the work (89-91).

<sup>122</sup> *Oratio*, 41-3.

uncleanness of filth, and the ravenous whirlpools of impiety”. The charge of Plato’s banishment of poets is countered by the argument that Plato himself, in “the *Alcibiades* [...] confirms that [the poets] enclose opinions truly golden in the obscure covering of riddles, which only the minds of good men can understand”.<sup>123</sup>

Allegory-based conceptions of poetry are also found in the two treatises occasioned by Stephen Gosson’s 1579 *Schoole of Abuse*.<sup>124</sup> As already discussed, Lodge’s reply to Gosson offers another complete statement, resorting to allegory as the first and chief counter-argument to Gosson’s charges. As for Sidney’s *Defence of Poetry*, little needs to be added to Borris’ analysis of the allegorical element in the treatise, a much-needed corrective to generations of critical evasion.<sup>125</sup> Sidney appeals to allegory throughout the work, and it is especially prominent in its closing passages, which include, beside enthusiastic references to Cornutus and Landino, Sidney’s own plea to his readers to believe, “*with me*, that there are many mysteries contained in poetry, which of purpose were written darkly, lest by profane wits it should be abused”.<sup>126</sup> That these are found in the closing passages of the peroration seems significant; the reader goes away with Sidney’s emphatically personal recommendation of the doctrine.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, Sidney’s famous definition of poetry, so exemplary of the

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 39. The reference is to the *Second Alcibiades*, now considered apocryphal, where Socrates quotes a verse from *Margites* and then proceeds to explain its “riddling” sense, on the premise that its author “speaks enigmatically, just like a poet. All poetry, by its nature, is enigmatic, and not everyone can take it in” (147b-d). Ficino highlights the passage with a marginal note, “Poësis ænigmatum plena”, which probably accounts for its further dissemination; see *Omnia divini Platonis opera*, ed. M. Ficino [1484], rev. S. Grynaeus (1532; repr. Basel, 1546), d6r. In his note to the passage, Ringler shows that Dethick probably did not get the reference directly from Ficino’s Plato, but an entry in the section “De poetis” in Brusonius’ florilegium *Facetiarum exemplorumq[ue] libri VII* (Rome, 1518), 24v. The same passage is adduced in support of the allegorical doctrine by Chapman in his *Free and Offenceles Iustification, of... Andromeda liberata* (London, 1614), \*2v; cf. S. Lucas, “Ficino and the Poetry of George Chapman”, in *Marsilio Ficino*, ed. M. J. B. Allen and V. Rees (Leiden, 2001), 433.

<sup>124</sup> For a conspectus of the debate on whether Sidney’s *Defence* is to be seen as a reply to *The Schoole of Abuse* up to the 1970s, see Gosson, *Markets*, 43-51. Kinney’s conclusion there is that Sidney’s treatise presents an elaborate answer to Gosson, “as its structure, choice of issues, and subtle parody of language amply testify”, but the evidence is not entirely conclusive. Cf. n. 115 above. On balance, it seems plausible that Gosson’s *Schoole* provided the initial impetus for Sidney’s *Defence* – especially since it was dedicated to Sidney, and it is documented that Sidney knew it and “scorned” it – but that it should not be approached as elaborate confutation of the pamphlet.

<sup>125</sup> Borris, *Allegory*, 110-14.

<sup>126</sup> Sidney, *Defence*, 121, emphasis mine; for the other references to allegory see pp. 74, 87, 94-5, 103, 107, 121.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Harington placing his “Briefe and Summarie Allegorie” of the *Orlando* “in the latter end” of the work, “as it were for a farewell, as men do at a great dinner, in which they haue almost surfeited vpon sundrie sorts of meats, more delicate then wholesome, yet in the end close vp their stomakes with a peece of a Quince, or strengthen and helpe their digestion with a cuppe of Sacke [...]. Also I do the rather place it in the end of my

period's critical tendencies in its synthesis of the essential Platonic, Aristotelian, Horatian, and Plutarchian commonplaces, is revealed in its true light only when counterbalanced with his other definition, offered later on in the treatise, in response to the charge that poets are liars.<sup>128</sup> Just like Willes, Sidney counters this charge by the claim that poetry is allegorical by definition, and before rushing to attribute to Sidney, or any other critic of the period, a precociously modern understanding of poetic licence, note should be taken of this corollary and the definition of poetry implied in it – the poet may range freely within the zodiac of his own wit, but only as long as the ecliptic to which that zodiac is aligned remains firmly allegorical.<sup>129</sup> Sidney does not make this as explicit as some other theorists, yet both the full context of his argument and contemporary parallels clearly show this to be the case.<sup>130</sup>

While ignored by most modern commentators, Sidney's allegorism was not lost on such contemporaries as his secretary William Temple, who produced a dialectical analysis of the *Defence*, or Harington, who had it before him when he composed the "Briefe Apologie of Poetrie" prefaced to his 1591 translation of Ariosto.<sup>131</sup> Indeed, Harington has this precise

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booke, because commonly, that which men reade last stickes best in their memories, as so I wish this to do, being as it were the verie kynnell and principall part, or as the marrow, and the rest but the bone or vnprofitable shell" (Mm2r-v).

<sup>128</sup> *Defence*, 79-80.

<sup>129</sup> Though the poet "recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not [...]. What child is there, that coming to a play, and seeing *Thebes* written in great letters upon an old door, doth believe that it is *Thebes*? If then a man can arrive to that child's age to know that the poets' persons and doings are but pictures of what should be, and not stories what have been, they will never give the lie to things not affirmatively but allegorically and figuratively written" (ibid., 103).

<sup>130</sup> More explicit statements of what was referred to as the "impossible credible" are found in contemporary Italian critics: see, for example, Mazzoni in his 1585 defence of Dante, quoted in Borris, *Allegory*, 35: "a licence was granted to Poets to feign the impossible in the literal sense, as long as they followed the credible in the allegorical sense".

<sup>131</sup> See William Temple's "Analysis", ed. J. Webster (Binghamton, 1984), 135-9; cf. Borris, *Allegory*, 113-14. Analyzing the argumentation of Sidney's reply to the accusation of lying, Temple explains how it is refuted, first, by way of comparison with other disciplines (if poetry lies, then other arts also lie); secondly, by furthering this comparison into a contradiction (unlike the other disciplines, poetry does not aim at truth and is thus least guilty of lying); thirdly, by pointing out the intentional element in lying (unlike the poet, the liar wants to be believed). "Finally", continues Temple, "the calumny is refuted from the definition of poetry./ An allegorical fiction of something that either should or should not be, does not lie./ Poetry is this kind of allegorical fiction./ Poetry, therefore, does not lie" ("Analysis", 139). Note that Temple's treatment of "poetry" and "allegory" as synonyms is perfectly deliberate, and that he makes a point of noting that this particular answer to the charge of lying proceeds "from the definition of poetry" – i.e. that according to Sidney, as understood by Temple, poetry is allegorical by definition. This argument for the allegorical veracity of fiction would remain in use long into the seventeenth century; for example, at the end of the period covered by this study, E. Phillips, in the Preface to his *Theatrum Poetarum* (London, 1675), \*6r, requires "proper Allegorie" in a heroic poem, "for what ever is pertinently said by way of *Allegorie* is Morally though not Historically true". Harington's "Briefe Apologie" is complemented by the allegorical interpretations found at the end of each canto, and the "Briefe and Summarie Allegorie" appearing at the end of the work. Various attempts have been made to extricate Harington from his

passage before him when he argues that poets cannot be charged with lying because they are “never affirming any for true”.<sup>132</sup> Then, in the passage immediately following, he proceeds to expand Sidney’s briefly stated corollary to this claim – that poetry is “allegorically and figuratively written” – into an extended statement of allegorical poetics, postulating three levels of meaning (literal, moral, and allegorical) and giving an example of such interpretation in the tale of Perseus.<sup>133</sup> Allegory is also made essential in Harington’s “Of reeding poetry”, the theoretical section of his translation with commentary of the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, completed in 1604 for presentation to James I’s son Henry. Unlike Plato, Harington does not feel allegoresis to exceed a child’s intellectual capacities, and the fifth of the five rules prescribed for the ten-year-old heir apparent enjoins him “to bee inquysytyve to vnderstand all the misticall sences of the Poet yow reed”.<sup>134</sup>

An intriguing but inconclusive case is presented by William Scott’s *Model of Poesy*, a manuscript treatise written around 1599, presenting us with a clash between allegorical and literalist tendencies within one and the same work.<sup>135</sup> Thus at various points Scott seems favourably disposed to allegory: it is optional in pastoral, obligatory in epic, and generally

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manifest enthusiasm for allegory: e.g., T. Rich, *Harington & Ariosto* (New Haven, 1940), 151-4; Atkins, *Renascence*, 194-5; T. G. A. Nelson, “Sir John Harington and the Renaissance Debate over Allegory”, *SP* 82 (1985): 359-79. No argument is spared, including the apocryphal anecdote according to which Harington undertook the translation of the whole of Ariosto because his initial translation of one lewd episode offended Elizabeth, who, “thinking it proper to affect indignation at some indelicate passages, forbad our author the court, till he had translated the entire work”; H. Harington, *Nugæ Antiquæ*, ed. T. Park (London, 1804), 1: xi. The allegorical apparatus, Harington’s apologists explain, is part of this attempt to placate the offended queen, rather than a reflection of his genuine literary and intellectual convictions. It is perhaps still worth pointing out that the full weight of this story hangs on an exceedingly fine thread of early nineteenth-century hearsay: its source is not in the Harington family papers from which H. Harington compiled the original edition of the *Nugæ Antiquæ*, but was reportedly told to T. Park, the editor of the 1804 edition, by a certain “Mr. Walker”, who in turn claimed to have learned it from J. Caulfield, first earl of Charlemont (*ibid.*, 1: x, n. 2). See also T. Churchyard’s Sidney-inspired *Praise of Poetrie*, which avoids the term *allegory*, but repeatedly reiterates the concept: “Sift eurie word and sentence well/ And cast away the bran/ To show the kernel, crack the shell/ In peeces now and than”; “What can be counted foule or cleane/ But Poets thereon talke/ Yet thousands knows not what they meane/ When they in cloud will walke”; T. Churchyard, *A Mysicall Consort* (London, 1595), F4v, G3r.

<sup>132</sup> *Orlando*, ¶4r. On Harington’s knowledge of Sidney’s works in manuscript, see H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts* (1996; repr. Oxford, 2003).

<sup>133</sup> As first recognized by Long, all this is taken over, often verbatim, from the second of Leone Ebreo’s *Dialogues of Love*: see P. W. Long, “A Detail of Renaissance Criticism”, *MLN* 15 (1900): 42-5; Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love* (Toronto, 2009), 160-7. Like Willes, Harington adds that “the like infinite Allegories I could pike out of other Poeticall fictions, save that I would avoid tediousnes”, and indeed he could, as Leone’s Philo goes on allegorize many other myths in the remainder of the dialogue.

<sup>134</sup> J. Harington, *The Sixth Book of Virgil’s “Aeneid”*, ed. S. Cauchi (Oxford, 1991), 100.

<sup>135</sup> Scott’s treatise was known to E. K. Chambers but subsequently passed into a private collection. It was acquired by the British Library in 2003 (Add MS 81083), and is now available in an outstanding edition by Alexander: W. Scott, *The Model of Poesy*, ed. G. Alexander (Cambridge, 2013).



conducive to a poem's "sweetness".<sup>136</sup> At each point, however, this impulse is undercut by the opposite tendency, taking Scott into the company of Vives and Gosson. Similitudes, we thus read, must be clear, appropriate, and "must not wade into filthy, obscene, and corrupt matters [...], lest you bemuddle more than instruct"; most importantly, they must not extend to matters of religion.<sup>137</sup> "But perhaps", Scott comments, "this scrupulous plainness will have fastened on it by some self-liking judge the name of folly" – if so, he is "content to be a fool" rather than blaspheme his maker, and proclaims "these gay Babylonish garments anathema". Only two pages after allowing for "some" allegorical wisdom in Ovid, he complains against "Ovid's gross fables" and "unreverend fictions", and is unable to defend him or Homer from Scaliger's charge of "oftentimes speak[ing] of their gods as of their swine".<sup>138</sup> In any case, whatever "true" allegories may be unearthed in classical poets, we should prefer the Christian Muse of du Bartas, "the first reformer and refiner of our corrupted faculties".<sup>139</sup>

Unfortunately, especially for the purposes of the present study, the manuscript of the *Model* contains an eight-page lacuna in the section dealing with the definition of poetry. After

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<sup>136</sup> The epic "narration is called a *fable* or feigning imitation of the actions of men, with conveniency and aptness framed to answer the general form of some particular virtues to be followed; which form is called the *allegory* (saith Viperanus), whilst in the pretending a bare report of some singular and particular accidents we (as by mystery) enwrap and convey properly the universal nature of some moral or civil virtue: as we showed above in Aeneas" (ibid., 73). See also Scott's discussion of epic poets, which does not distinguish between the classical epic and the allegorical romance of Spenser or Sidney, and where Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are described as "in narration clouding much natural and moral knowledge" (19-20). In the pastoral there is "sometime beyond the immediate next sense [...] some higher and hidden meaning, which is called the *allegory* or mystical sense, and this is that Sir Philip Sidney means when he saith the pastoral under the pretty tales of wolves and sheep includes oftentimes the whole considerations of wrong-doing and patience, that shows out of Meliboeus' mouth the miserable people's estate under hard lords or ravening soldiers" (80). Scott follows Scaliger in deducing the four qualities required in order "to strike with the pleasure of our poem the doors of men's senses": "first a *proportionableness* or uniformity; secondly *variety*; thirdly *sweetness*; lastly [...] *energeia*" (33). Discussing the requirement of "sweetness", he stresses in particular "that kind of invention which is grounded on likeness, as when I conceive a thing not as it is in itself and own nature but as it is like another more familiar or sensible thing", a broad category extending from the analogical grounding of all human thought, through metaphor, to more complex types of "resemblancing conceits" – fables, parables, personifications, and allegories, including those derived from classical authors like Ovid: "Likewise of this suit are those fabulous narrations of Ovid, in some proportionableness agreeing to true moral and natural instructions. Of this kind are all allegories and the feigning of persons, as when wisdom is feigned in the Scripture to be a woman; this investing of qualities with persons and following of the agreement is of marvellous moving delectableness" (40).

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 41-2: "Lastly, you must not feign things to be that which by religion and divine authority you are prohibited to resemble to anything. And this unavoidably lights on them that will needs go to school with the heathens to learn of them how to deify creatures and certain qualities; not much unlike this fault is the investing God with the titles of ethnic idols. Now we make love, lust, fortune, water, earth (what not?) gods, offering them incense of our prayers and thanks; anon we call God Jupiter, Apollo, Neptune, etc. – heathenish idols."

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 43. In the manuscript, Scott's *Model* is followed by an incomplete translation of Du Bartas' *Divine Weeks*. On Scott's and his family's "Puritan" tendencies in religion, see *Model*, ed. Alexander, xxix.

his opening remarks, Scott proceeds to define poetry according to its genus, difference, and use. As to the genus, it is an art, rather than “a divine fury or inspired force”; as to the difference, it is “*imitation or of feigning and representing in style*” (distinguishing it from “all faculties that consist not in feigning or imitation – as that of oratory, history, and the sciences – or feign not style – as painting, carving, and the like”). Tantalizingly, the remainder of the discussion on the difference, and the beginning of the discussion of the use of poetry – precisely the place where an appeal to allegory, or an absence thereof, would be significant in this survey – is lost in the lacuna, so that we cannot know for sure whether or not Scott saw allegory as an essential property of poetry in general.

Something of this same conflict also appears in another Latin university oration, the *Artis poeticae et versificatoriae encomium* (1624) of Caleb Dalechamp, a Cambridge M.A. in theology.<sup>140</sup> Dalechamp, however, does include an explicit endorsement of the allegorical doctrine:

all men whose ‘hearts are neither simple nor foolish’ admit that not only is their mind stirred more by a verse than a prose oration, but also that the feeling of their mind is soothed by the highly ingenious hidden meaning of the stories and thus that they are fed towards a knowledge of the sciences by a kind of seasoning as it were.<sup>141</sup>

There is another passage in which Dalechamp adduces the “beneficial effects” of poetry to its figurative and allegorical meanings, additionally interesting for a clever spin on the stock examples of Origen and Democritus, which are revealing of the context in which he undertakes to defend such an allegorical understanding of poetry, namely that of a student of Protestant theology addressing a community espousing decidedly anti-allegorical hermeneutical principles.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> This appeared as the second of Dalechamp’s *Exercitationes dvae* (London, 1624).

<sup>141</sup> Dalechamp, *Encomium*, 171. Binns’ translation has been modified to acknowledge the citation, which is italicized in the original but not indicated in the translation or identified in the notes. It is from the Latin translation of two lines from the *Odyssey* found in Erasmus’ *Adages* (*Works*, 5: 376).

<sup>142</sup> See Dalechamp, *Encomium*, 173. Origen in particular came to embody the allegorical tradition, and Origen-bashing, often involving the viciously ironic account of his castration, is almost a commonplace with the English writers of the period. For an example from the same year as Dalechamp’s treatise, see P. Simson, *The Historie of the Chvrch* (London, 1624), T6r: “Notwithstanding all these excellent gifts and renowned fame of *Origen*, hee wanted not his owne grosse errors, and foolish facts. In expounding of Scriptures, he became a curious searcher out of allegories. Yet this father of allegories *Origen*, mistook the words of Christ spoken of

At the far end of the spectrum from the tactful theology student, we find Henry Reynolds and his *Mythomystes* (c.1632), in which English poetics catches up with the more esoteric reaches of Italian humanism.<sup>143</sup> Reynolds' treatise sets out to prove *the Natvre and Valve of Trve Poësie, and depth of the Ancients aboue our Moderne Poëts*, consisting wholly in the fact that the ancient poets, unlike most modern ones, understood that good poetry should contain "high and Mysticall matters", especially those pertaining to the knowledge of natural things, and that these "should by riddles and engimaticall knotts be kept inuiolate from the prophane Multitude".<sup>144</sup> It is ironic that *Mythomystes*, when mentioned at all, was singled out for special derision by early historians of English "Renaissance" poetics, when it is really the most "Renaissance" of all English poetical treatises of the period, if the actual influence of Italian humanist critics, and of rediscovered or reanimated ancient texts, is to be the measure.<sup>145</sup> If Reynolds is in any way aberrant, it is not in his notion of allegory as an essential requirement of all "true" poetry, but in his extolling of natural at the expense of moral allegory, a novel development which deserves more attention than it has received thus far.

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Eunuches, *There bee some chaste, which haue made themselues chaste for the kingdome of heauen*: these words, I say, spoken in an allegoricoll sense, hee tooke in a simple and vnfigure meaning, and gelded himselfe, to the end hee might liue without all suspition of vncleannesse." In order to make an allegorical conception of poetry palatable to his audience, Dalechamp twists the familiar story to his own end: "Shall we, with Origen (a man infamous in other respects because of his craze for allegorizing) interpret in a literal and absolute fashion words which ought to be taken figuratively? No; let us rather boldly proclaim of sight and poetry and the other gifts of God, what the Apostle declares of the law: 'But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully.'" If figurative readings may be misused, so may literal ones. In this way, Dalechamp manages to pledge his orthodoxy in explicitly dismissing the "infamous" allegorist, while at the same time using his example to justify the essential role of allegory in his theory of poetry. The dedication of the *Exercitationes* is addressed to the heads of the University of Cambridge. Dalechamp went on to a B.D. in theology and a career in the church; all of his other works are of a prominently religious nature and "establish Dalechamp as a theologian of minor importance in Cambridge circles who wrote mainly on peripheral theological issues" (*Treatises*, ed. Binns, 138).

<sup>143</sup> H. R[eynolds], *Mythomystes* (London, [1632?]). The "booke called *Mithomystes a Survey. of Poetry* by Henry Reynolds gent[leman]" was entered on the Stationers' Register on 10 August 1632 for John Waterson, "vnder the handes of Master Buckner and Master Aspley warden"; the entry was then "crost out by his [Waterson's] owne Consent and resigned to the Author vt patet supra &c." (*Register*, ed. Arber, 4: 248). It was eventually printed by H. Seyle, presumably not long after.

<sup>144</sup> Reynolds, *Mythomystes*, F3r-v.

<sup>145</sup> Reynolds mentions Ariosto, Bembo, Guarini, Marino, Sannazaro, Tasso, and quotes or cites Aulus Gellius, Maximus of Tyre, Conti's *Mythologies*, Poliziano's *Silvae*, Farra's *Settenario*, and above all Pico della Mirandola, to whom he refers to throughout the work, and who is clearly the major influence on his arguments. For negative estimates of *Mythomystes*, see *Essays*, ed. Spingarn, 1: xxi; Clark, *Rhetoric*, 96; Atkins, *Renascence*, 287: "perverse", "ill-directed and wrong-headed", "a tropical forest of strange fancies", "wool-gathering".

The seven authors discussed above belong to a range of social and intellectual contexts: Willes and Dethick show us how late sixteenth-century university students might have approached the subject; Dalechamp is also a student, but of more decidedly theological bent; Lodge is a hired pen, cutting and pasting for an immediate polemical purpose; Sidney and Harington are courtiers with a shared intellectual and social background, albeit very different ambitions and temperaments; Reynolds is, or would be, an esoteric mystic. In spite of these differences, however, their theories of poetry all share the conviction that, in principle, all good poetry is allegorical poetry. In principle, it is to be emphasized: even those authors who explicitly listed allegory as a requirement of poetry in general would not have demanded it from every single work of imaginative literature they encountered. They all expected literature to be edifying, and in many cases this could be achieved under the rubric of the example. Literature which represented ordinary or at least probable events and characters, and had a readily intelligible moral perspective, was not necessarily dredged for hidden meanings; the example was deemed sufficiently edifying. However, once pagan mythology entered the picture, or supernatural beings and events deriving from other sources, or anything else which could not be accommodated under the category of the example, allegory was called to aid.

Exceptions to the pattern – comprehensive treatises which do *not* define allegory as an essential property of all good poetry – prove equally revealing. First of all, not one of these four texts contains an explicit rejection of the doctrine, and furthermore, even if they do not define it as essential, three of the four welcome it to at least a certain extent. Thus George Puttenham’s *Art of English Poesy* (1589) awards allegory a distinguished place in discussing the “fables” of the ancients, some of which would be inexcusable were they not “altogether figurative and mystical, covertly applied to some moral or natural sense”.<sup>146</sup> Allegory is also

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<sup>146</sup> *Art*, 1.12. Tantalizing is Puttenham’s mention of his lost “books of *Hierotechnē*”, but all that can be safely inferred about the work from this passage is that pagan religion was among the subjects treated in it. Puttenham briefly expounds his theory of its origin, yet indicates that this is but one element in the larger scope of the lost work: “whereof it [i.e., pagan religion] first proceeded and grew [...] appeareth more at large in our books of *Hierotechnē*”.

an essential requirement in the pastoral genre.<sup>147</sup> However, Puttenham does not explicitly list it as an essential property of poetry in general. A passage in his chapter on the subject matter of poetry seems to come close, but on closer scrutiny proves inconclusive.<sup>148</sup> Also inconclusive is Puttenham's idiosyncratic treatment of allegory as a trope, which is clearly influenced by the allegorical tradition (and the post-classical rhetorical tradition, which had itself departed from classical rhetoric in absorbing influence from the allegorical tradition). Puttenham follows the classical rhetoricians when he employs the term to denote a trope, defines it as "a long and perpetual *metaphor*", and gives examples consistent with this definition.<sup>149</sup> He departs from them, however, when he ascribes to allegory such attributes as will not be found, and are indeed incompatible with, its treatment in the classical treatises. Thus allegory is defined as "a duplicity of meaning or dissimulation under covert and dark intendments".<sup>150</sup> Stressing the "covert" and the "dark", the definition reflects the allegorical rather than the rhetorical tradition, as does the source of the English name he bestows upon his "courtly figure" – Figure of the False Semblant, borrowed from the eponymous personification in the *Romance of the Rose* – and above all his appraisal of allegory as "the chief ringleader and captain of all other figures either in the poetical or oratory science".<sup>151</sup>

The reason, then, for Puttenham's omission of an explicit statement defining allegory as essential to all poetic fiction is certainly not any fundamental hostility towards allegory.

The same goes for Alberico Gentili's 1593 *Commentatio ad Legem III Codicis de*

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 1.18.

<sup>148</sup> "The subject matter of poesy" is said to consist in the following: "the chief principal is the laud, honor, and glory of the immortal gods (I speak now in phrase of the gentiles). Secondly, the worthy gests of noble princes, the memorial and registry of all great fortunes, the praise of virtue and reproof of vice, *the instruction of moral doctrines, the revealing of sciences natural and other profitable arts*, the redress of boisterous and sturdy courages by persuasion, the consolation and repose of temperate minds, finally the common solace of mankind in all his travails and cares of this transitory life" (ibid., 1.11, emphasis mine). The italicized clauses can certainly seem to refer to moral and natural allegory, these being the two kinds of "mystical" sense Puttenham distinguishes in the passage cited above. In the larger context, however, it seems more likely that the sort of "instruction of moral doctrines" Puttenham has in mind here works by example rather than allegory (see 1.13), and that "the revealing of sciences natural and other profitable arts" refers to such works of versified philosophy and science as he goes on to briefly discuss in 1.21.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 3.7. "Mystical" is the term he reserves for "allegorical" in the sense used in this study; besides the passage cited above, see also: "So as to the God of the Christians such divine praise might be verified; to the other gods, none but figuratively or in mystical sense" (1.12).

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 3.7. This departure from the classical definitions is all the more striking as it follows immediately upon the standard definition of metaphor as "an inversion of sense by transport"; one would expect that the standard definition of allegory as an extended metaphor, or chain of metaphors, will follow.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 3.18.

*professoribus et medicis*, a commentary, as its unpromising title states, on a statute of Roman law regarding teachers and physicians, the first part of which contains a general and comprehensive defence of poetry.<sup>152</sup> The first thing to note here is that that even though written and published in England, Gentili's treatise is atypical in a number of ways. Gentili arrived to England at the age of twenty-eight as a formed thinker with a doctorate in civil law from the University of Perugia, and his intellectual background is different from the native critics discussed above.<sup>153</sup> Even more importantly, his *Commentatio* must be seen within the specific polemical context of the Oxford dispute about academic drama between John Rainolds and William Gager.<sup>154</sup> There can be little doubt that the primary purpose of the *Commentatio* was to enter the polemic and take arms against Rainolds, and that its subject

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<sup>152</sup> This text is the second of the two commentaries in A. Gentili, *Ad Tit. C. De maleficis et math. et ceter. similibvs commentaries. Item... Commentatio ad L. III. C. De professor. & medic.* (Oxford, 1593).

<sup>153</sup> A comparison with Dalechamp is instructive: although of French descent, Dalechamp must have come to England at a significantly younger age than Gentili, for he obtained his degrees from English universities and was capable of writing what Binns describes as "vigorous and lively prose which displays an idiomatic command of the [English] language" (*Treatises*, 137-8). Binns states that Dalechamp "studied for ten years at the Universities of Sedan and Cambridge" (*ibid.*, 137), but the entry in the *Cambridge Alumni Database* actually specifies that he "studied 10 years at Cambridge and then at Sedan" (emphasis mine). By comparison, Gentili never published a word of English and he is conversant with Italian critics cited rarely or never by his English peers, such as Fracastoro, Patrizi, Riccoboni, and Zabarella; some of his reading in this field may have come by way of his brother Scipione, from whose writings Gentili cites in the *Commentatio* (85, 99). Incidentally, in their edition of Sidney's *Defence*, Duncan-Jones and Van Dorsten suggest that "The pervading influence of continental humanism in the *Defence* would suggest a personal link between Sidney and some foreign poet-theorist" (63), tentatively proposing H. Estienne. But what about Alberico and/or Scipione? It is well-established that Alberico arrived to England in August 1580, where he was welcomed by influential fellow émigrés like Leicester's physician Gulio Borgarucci and Elizabeth's Italian tutor Battista Castiglione, by whom he was introduced to Tobie Matthew, Leicester, and Sidney, all of whom would act as his benefactors, as acknowledged in the dedications of his publications. According to what he relates in the dedication, dated 21 July 1585, of his *De legationibus libri tres* (New York, 1924), 2: iii-vii, Gentili met Sidney soon after his arrival to England, and their relationship was one of "acquaintance and intimacy", involving "not only [...] correspondence but also [...] frequent personal interviews". It is unclear whether Alberico was accompanied by his brother, but it is certain that Scipione was in England in 1581, and that he too was then introduced to Sidney, to whom he dedicated two volumes of Latin poetry published that year in London. Scipione dedicated further works to Sidney, and during his second stay in England composed a poem celebrating the birth of Sidney's daughter. Thus both Alberico and Scipione appear to have been in contact with Sidney during the period to which the composition of the *Defence* may plausibly be dated, on which see Sidney, *Defence*, 59-63.

<sup>154</sup> For all the attention it has received ever since it was first examined in Boas' *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (Oxford, 1914), 229-51, the account of this polemic is still incomplete. Rainolds and Gentili exchanged four more letters in addition to those printed in *Th' overthrow of Stage-Playes* (Middelburg, 1599), preserved in the same manuscript (Corpus Christi College Library MS 352) as the other surviving correspondence relating to the quarrel. These have been discussed, for example by Binns, but remain unpublished; see J. W. Binns, "Women or Transvestites on the Elizabethan Stage?", *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 5 (1974): 95-120; *REED: Oxford*, ed. J. R. Elliott, Jr., et al. (Toronto, 2004), 860-1. The last item in the manuscript is a copy of the first of Gentili's *Disputationes dvæ* (Hanover, 1599), which is also related to the quarrel, but are seldom discussed, and have never been edited or translated. Gentili's dedication of the *Disputationes* to T. Matthew is dated October 1597, which means that the *Disputationes* came first, and that *Th' overthrow* was Rainolds' response.

was a pretext for Gentili to defend his professional territory and argue the case for the separation of civil and canon law.<sup>155</sup> In this context, there were compelling reasons for Gentili to avoid allegory in the *Commentatio*. By 1593, he was Oxford's Regius Professor of Civil Law of six years standing and a renowned authority on the subject. On the other hand, his nationality, his conformism, his powerful connections in the court, his role in the Mendoza affair, and in particular his views on the prerogatives of civil law – epitomized by the celebrated sentence, “Silete theologi in munere alieno”<sup>156</sup> – would not have endeared him to a figure like Rainolds, who, among others, opposed Gentili's appointment to the chair, and to whom Gentili's professed Protestantism may well have seemed little more than a front for dangerous, perhaps even “Papist” opinions.<sup>157</sup>

In taking arms against an opponent as formidable and unsympathetic as Rainolds, he was, then, to proceed with caution. Some arguments would be off-limits, and among them any attempt to defend literature on the basis of allegory, for that would have almost certainly met

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<sup>155</sup> The trajectory of the polemic, which moves from general questions of literature and theatre, to the question of transvestism as such, and from there to the territorial dispute on the jurisdiction of canon and civil law, would seem to confirm this, as well as to account for its increasing bitterness and longevity. In the initial letter to Rainolds, accompanied with a copy of the *Commentatio*, Gentili barely mentions the immediate subject of acting, but elaborates at length on his “duty to defend always the civil law, which I profess, and which I have always served as a most just one. If, however, I came into your territory, I not only tried to guard my territory, and you knew this was the law when you wished to visit us in our territory. Although I have not been able to reflect upon you, who have come into that disputation after my observations, I nevertheless thought that the moral and civil polity aspects of the sacred books were either ours, or surely common to us and to the theologians. I truly persist in that same opinion even now”; *Latin Correspondence by Alberico Gentili and John Rainolds*, ed. L. Markowicz (Salzburg, 1977), 19.

<sup>156</sup> “Let the theologians keep silence about a matter which is outside of their province”; trans. in A. Gentili, *De iure belli libri tres* (Oxford, 1933), 1: F6v, 2: 57. For discussions of the sentence, both in its original context and its “mythical” afterlife, see *The Roman Foundations of the Law of Nations*, ed. B. Kingsbury and B. Straumann (Oxford, 2010), esp. the chapters by Malcolm and Koskenniemi.

<sup>157</sup> “Xenophobia ran rampant” in 1580s Oxford, writes Feingold, “as it did in England more generally, and was directed with particular rancor against Italians – including those whose Protestant credentials appeared impeccable”; the “Oxford Calvinists [...] invariably regarded Italian (and Spanish) émigrés as prone to heresy, or at least as being inconstant in matters of religion and morals”; M. Feingold, “Giordano Bruno in England, Revisited”, *HLQ* 67 (2004): 329–46, pp. 333–4. In one of his unpublished letters to Rainolds, dated 8 February 1594, Gentili notes that Rainolds and others had opposed his appointment, and accused him of “Italica levitas” in his dealings (*ibid.*). Further evaluation of Gentili's position would have to look into the confessional dimensions of the very subject of civil, i.e., Roman law: according to J. Ayliffe, *The Antient and Present State of the University of Oxford* (London, 1714), 1: 188, the study of law, both civil and canon, had been almost abandoned at Oxford in the sixteenth century for “savouring too much of Popery”. How much of that savour endured into the day of Gentili and Rainolds? An intriguing comment is also found in a footnote in T. E. Holland's *Studies in International Law* (Oxford, 1898), 15–16, n. 4: “It would seem”, he writes, “from notes occurring here and there in the Bodleian MSS.” – i.e., the Gentili manuscripts in the Bodleian's D'Orville collection – “that Alberico, about 1593, had to defend himself against the charge of being an ‘Italus Atheus’”, Italian atheist. 1593 is the precise year in which Gentili came into conflict with Rainolds; unfortunately, Holland does not provide any sort of reference for this comment, and I have not been able to locate it.

with condemnation on Rainolds' part, and would perhaps even been taken as an opportunity to cast a passing shadow over the Italian jurist's religious orthodoxy.<sup>158</sup> Condemnations of "popish allegories" abound in the orthodox Protestant literature of the day, including Rainolds' own writings, and Gentili would not have allowed himself to walk into so obvious a trap.<sup>159</sup> That this was the cause of his avoidance of explicit recourse allegory in the *Commentatio* is made further plausible by evidence suggesting that he was not really averse to the doctrine: for example, he cites with approval the Homeric orations of Maximus of Tyre and Fulgentius' *Exposition of the Content of Virgil according to Moral Philosophy*, both paradigmatically allegorical in approach.<sup>160</sup> If, then, he is an exception to the allegorical rule, Gentili is a very specific, and only partial exception; he does not seem to have subscribed to a genuinely non-allegorical theory of poetry, but to have tactically avoided what was, in a specific polemical context, a potentially harmful argument.

There remain two works, both fragmentary and hence inconclusive for the purposes of the present analysis: excerpts from what may have been a comprehensive poem on the subject of poetics in the Epistle to the anonymous *First Booke of the Preservation of King Henry the*

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<sup>158</sup> A detail from their correspondence proves revealing. Gentili could not avoid a figurative interpretation of Deut. 22:5, the key biblical text against cross-dressing, and Rainolds predictably accuses him of misconstruing the passage by interpreting it, "contrary to all the theologians, not literally but figuratively, not concerning clothes but concerning a shameful deed committed by bared clothing" (*Correspondence*, ed. Markowicz, 33). In his reply, Gentili rushes to vaunt his Protestant credentials and pre-emptively dismiss the possible implication of such charges, in a manifestly disingenuous attempt to turn them on his opponent. Thus he accuses Rainolds, of all people, of preventing him "from treating the sacred books out of a papist spirit", and acting "tyrannically with him who despised the power of the Pope and was banished from the country and the entire papal realm" (ibid., 39). Implicit in this is Gentili's awareness – for no such characterization is actually made by Rainolds – that there was a savour of popery even in such figurative interpretations as he was offering of Deut. 22:5, to say nothing of allegorical interpretations proper. Several years later, in the *Disputationes dvæ*, Gentili explicitly endorses a "mystical" (C7v) interpretation of the Deuteronomy prohibition, citing Philo, *On the Special Laws*, referring to "highly gifted men who think that most of the contents of the law-book are outward symbols of hidden truths, expressing in words what has been left unsaid"; see Philo (Cambridge, Mass., 1929-62), 7: 587.

<sup>159</sup> See the record of Rainolds' discussions with the convicted English Catholic J. Hart: *The Symme of the Conference betwene Iohn Rainoldes and Iohn Hart* (London, 1584). Rainolds' hermeneutics is conventionally Protestant in reserving allegory for such exceptionally obscure texts as Revelation (R3v), but rejecting it in most other contexts; see the section "How the scripture must be expounded", E5r, L7r-8r. For further discussion of the Protestant view of allegory, see ch. 3, esp. pp. 268-89.

<sup>160</sup> *Commentatio*, 79, 83. For translations of Maximus (see esp. orations 4 and 26) and Fulgentius, see Maximus of Tyre, *The Philosophical Orations* (Oxford, 1997); Fulgentius the Mythographer (Columbus, 1971). Gentili explicitly praises Fulgentius for having "compiled a book of moral precepts from Vergil alone, whom he considered a poet in name, in subject a most moral philosopher", and even defends him from the detractors of his method: "Away with you, Trithemius, whoever you are, who dare say that Fulgentius sought for gold in the mud." The reference is not traced by Binns; whatever edition Gentili used, it ultimately derives from the entry on Fulgentius in Johannes Trithemius' *Liber de Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis* ([Basel, 1494]), E5r: "Expositio Virgilianae co[n]tine[n]tiæ secu[n]du[m] philosophos morales: mirabilis industria auru[m] i luto".



viij. (1599), and the section on this subject in Ben Jonson's *Timber, or Discoveries*. The entry for the former in the Stationers' Register, dated 12 January 1600, speaks of "A booke called *The first booke of the preservation of Kinge HENRY the VIJ when he was but E[a]rle of RYCHEMOND Grandfather to the queens maiesty Wherevnto is annexed A commendation of true poetry. A Discommendation of all bawdy Rybald and paganizde poetes &c*". Although this latter title seems to designate a separate work, no such work appears in the single surviving copy of the *Preservation*. Its Epistle, however, does contain nine passages of verse, 83 lines in total, presented as extracts from a longer poem on the subject of poetry and poetic theory, and although this cannot be confirmed, thematic and verbal correspondences could be interpreted to indicate that this poem is the *Commendation... and Discommendation* noted as "annexed" to the main work.<sup>161</sup> This text has not received much attention in this respect, yet of the nine passages, two deal with fundamental questions of poetic theory, siding with the paradigm represented by Vives, Gosson, and partly Scott.<sup>162</sup> It is hard to draw firm conclusions from such a limited sample, but it seems possible – if the excerpts are not a mere conceit, and the author really is drawing from a much longer poem – that we have largely lost a very interesting contribution to the canon of comprehensive statements on the subject.

Finally, there is the relevant section in Jonson's commonplace book, which merits mention here as it appears to be comprehensive in design, yet its unfinished state prevents us

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<sup>161</sup> See *The First Book of the Preservation*, the Epistle, pitting "trew Poetry" against "rybaud and bawdy Poets", and "paganis'd Poets" (B1r-2r).

<sup>162</sup> "[R]ybaud and bawdy Poets be but the diuels agents, and are to be detested: but the virtuous and godly Poets are to be both reuerenced and regarded"; instead of "amorous madrigals", poets should "Aime at a trew Period, Christ Iesus"; "wee, that professe Christianity, should not vse any paganisme, to detract gods glorie, as the paganis'd Poets did, in the time of ignorance. For this I haue written of them, I meane, of Homer, Virgill, and others; [...] In truth, all they that professe trew Poetry should seeke to further the aduancement of gods glory what they may (which I pray God they may doe, to banish all these fond fantasticall and Veneriall Poets) and also to doe their best endeauour in trew Hexameters, to abolish this plain rythme-prose; that wee may imitate and follow the best learned, and auncient Poets: as Homer, Virgill, and Lucan in *Chronicles*" (B1r-2r). Early commentary, for example by Collier or Smith, is restricted to the author's participation in the vogue for quantitative verse in English; see *Illustrations of Old English Literature*, ed. J. P. Collier (London, 1866), 2: ii-iii (third pagination); *Essays*, ed. Smith, 1: xlvii. Spingarn was familiar with the entry in the Stationers' Register, but apparently considered the work lost (*History*, 267). For a recent attribution to a J. Lane (1564-1605) of Bentley, Staffordshire, see J. Considine, "John Lane's *Verball*", in *Words in Dictionaries and History*, ed. O. Timofeeva and T. Säily (Amsterdam, 2011).

from drawing any firm conclusions from the fact that includes no mention of allegory.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, largely absent from the *Discoveries* is any advanced discussion of the use of poetry and the nature of poetic subject matter – places where allegory may be expected to appear, or where its absence could be interpreted as significant. The translator of Horace repeats, of course, that the purpose of poetry is to teach and delight, but aside from a few passing remarks the nature of that teaching – including the test cases of epic or pastoral poetry<sup>164</sup> – is left unspecified. The definition of poetry is given in a nominally Aristotelian mode, without any recourse to allegory; it is “an art of imitation, of feigning; expressing the life of man in fit measure, numbers, and harmony”.<sup>165</sup> But what is the weight of this if we know that Jonson can employ the same Horatian and Aristotelian language in his description of the quintessentially allegorical genre of the masque?<sup>166</sup> Little can be said of the *Discoveries* within the limits of the present survey; the work is unfinished, and therefore inconclusive.<sup>167</sup>

The resulting ratio, then, eight to two in favour of the allegorists – with Scott, Jonson, and the author of the *Preservation* omitted as inconclusive – is comparable to that presented by Weinberg’s “new arts of poetry”, and is made further significant by the fact, already noted

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<sup>163</sup> Except in the classical rhetorical sense, in a passage translated from Quintilian: see *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, gen. ed. D. Bevington, M. Butler, and I. Donaldson (Cambridge, 2012), 7: 567.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Borris, *Allegory*, 3. As epic and pastoral gravitated towards the very highest and very lowest objects of poetic representation, the impulse to allegory was particularly strong with these genres. To anticipate some remarks in the Afterword (pp. 332-3), it is no coincidence that, two centuries later, Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads* combine poetic theory dismissing allegory and any other form of didacticism – poetry is “that species of composition [whose] *immediate* object [is] pleasure, not truth”, and that aims “to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure” – with poetic practice that juxtaposes supernatural fantasy with the representation of “common life”, and especially “Low and rustic life”, “in a selection of language really used by men”; *Lyrical Ballads*, 3rd ed. (London, 1802), 1: vii. It is further no coincidence that, in another century or so, these tendencies fuse in a work like Joyce’s *Ulysses*, where the archetypal work of Western epic fantasy becomes the mythical backdrop for the detailed representation of a day in the life of the most ordinary of men, down even to his most undignified bodily functions.

<sup>165</sup> Jonson, *Works*, 7: 578.

<sup>166</sup> See the preface to *Love’s Triumph through Callipolis*, significantly entitled “*To make the spectators understanders*”: “all representations, especially those of this nature in court, public spectacles, either have been, or ought to be the mirrors of man’s life, whose ends, for the excellence of their exhibitors (as being the donatives of great princes to their people), ought always to carry a mixture of profit with them no less than delight” (*Works*, 6: 333, emphasis mine).

<sup>167</sup> An obvious argument, but one which must be bracketed here, along with the rest of Jonson’s critical oeuvre, is that the greatest masque writer of the age would have hardly devised a comprehensive poetics that would make no room for allegory. Indeed, it is tempting to speculate whether the discrepancy between Jonson’s own allegorical practice and the absence of allegory in Heinsius’ *De constitutione tragoediae*, his chief source for the poetics section in the *Discoveries*, is the reason why the section is left incomplete. Did Jonson find himself paralyzed by the opposing demands of these tendencies? Cf. Redwine on the fact that Jonson never produced “a systematic and thoroughgoing essay on criticism”, and the “irreconcilable theories” and “accidental complexities” in his critical writings; *Ben Jonson’s Literary Criticism*, ed. J. D. Redwine, Jr. (Lincoln, 1970), xii.

above, that the authors come from a wide variety of social and intellectual backgrounds. Needless to say, there is, alongside such comprehensive statements, an unabated stream of publications which disseminate the allegorical theory of poetry in non-systematic forms, but the above survey, restricted to comprehensive statements, gives us a realistic and methodologically coherent estimate, derived from a clear set of criteria, of the place occupied by this theory in the period's poetical thought. According to this estimate, most critics consider allegory to be an essential attribute of all good poetry, and find it impossible to formulate a general theory of poetry without recourse to the doctrine. A minority does not consider it essential to all poetry, but does consider it an essential or at least auxiliary attribute of certain literary periods or genres. There is no instance of categorical hostility towards it. Furthermore, when all this is plotted onto a time-line, we see that the allegorical doctrine reigns virtually uncontested until well into the early decades of the seventeenth century. Very tentatively, we may perhaps find warrant here to begin to speculate about a transformation in attitude beginning to occur at that time, but only about a transformation – emergent, gradual, hesitant, uneven – not a precipitous turn, not a straightforward decline, and most certainly not an end.

#### SOME SHADOWE OF SATISFACTION

The state we find at the close of the sixteenth century is thus essentially the same as the one found in Plato's day: one party eschews the possibility of allegory and emphasizes poetry's aesthetic properties, but is consequently driven to censor the offensive elements it is perceived to contain; the other is able to keep these elements, but only by submitting them, in the final instance, to allegorical interpretation. These tendencies could be followed throughout the remainder of the seventeenth century. Thus William Davenant and Thomas Hobbes, writing in the interregnum, reject allegory, but at the same time curtail the imaginative scope of

modern epic poetry, and poetry in general, to the realm of the credible or the possible.<sup>168</sup>

Other English theorists of the epic continue in the allegorical tradition, allowing the marvellous or otherwise problematic elements on the condition they are underlined by a profitable allegorical sense. Indeed, at the very end of the period covered in this study, the venerable theory of the allegorical epic actually receives a powerful reinforcement in Le Bossu's 1675 treatise, translated into English in 1695, and echoed in the same year by Richard Blackmore, criticizing the earlier allegorical manner of Ariosto and Spenser, but only in contrast to the more polished allegorical poetics he sought to exemplify by his own *Prince Arthur*.<sup>169</sup>

What is conspicuously missing in all this is a position that would defend poetry *for* its imaginative or aesthetic properties rather than *in spite of* them; that could give a rationale for imaginative literature not in its presumed capacity to transmit content properly belonging to another discipline, but in one specific to itself; that could accommodate the entire compass of poetic fiction, from its lowest to its highest reaches, without finding it necessary to mitigate them through allegoresis. What is missing, in terms of the analogy with Plato's day, is an Aristotle. An Aristotle, it is to be emphasized: as is well known, the so-called rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* did not in itself meet this end. The work was indeed rediscovered – printed, translated, commented upon – and became a pervasive influence on subsequent critical thought, yet it was also consistently misinterpreted on a number of key counts, and

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<sup>168</sup> In his *Discourse upon Gondibert* (Paris, 1650), Davenant censures epic poets, both ancient but especially modern, for including supernatural and immoral elements in their works (A4v-11v). He makes limited room for allegory only in the case of the ancient poets, who were "the sacred Priests" of their times, and whose "supernaturall Tales [...] compounded the Religion, of Pleasure and Myserie" (A8v). He is recognizably Protestant, however, in his inversion of traditional view of allegorical poetics: the ancients, he claims, aimed their allegories at "the People", "whilst for the eternity of their Chiefs (more refin'd by education) they surely intended no such vain provision" (A8v-9r). But if such faults are "in a great degree excusable" in the ancients, with Christian poets, "whose Religion little needs the aids of invention", they merely "continue and increase the Melancholy mistakes of the People", and thus "admit no pardon". The "whole business" of poets is to "represent the Worlds true image [...] to our view" (A6r-v). Spenser's talents should have been employed on "matter of a more naturall, and therefore of a more usefull kind. His Allegoricall Story (by many held defective in the Connexion) resembling (me thinks) a continuance of extraordinary Dreams" (A10r). In his *Answer to Davenant's Discourse*, Hobbes reiterates these principles: the "strange Fictions and Metamorphoses" of the ancients "were not so remote from the Articles of their Faith, as they are now from ours, and therefore were not so unpleasant"; a Christian poet, however, may go "Beyond the actuall works of Nature [...]; but beyond the conceived possibility of Nature, never" (ibid., F11v).

<sup>169</sup> See Introduction, pp. 24-5.

conflated with sources and doctrines that have since been recognized as fundamentally un-Aristotelian, including that of allegory.

Even when nominally Aristotelian sixteenth-century critics write against allegory, under nominally Aristotelian principles, these principles turn out to be those of Weinberg's "pseudo-Aristotle". Such is the case with Castelvetro, who ignores allegory, but does so only on the utterly un-Aristotelian premise that poetry was invented "not for the pleasure of the educated" but "exclusively to delight and give recreation [...] to the minds of the rough crowd and of the common people".<sup>170</sup> What is implicit in Castelvetro is explicit in Fabbrizio Beltrami's 1594 *Alcune considerazioni intorno all'allegoria*, which not only ignore but categorically dismiss allegory as a rationale for poetic fiction on the same ground: poetry is intended exclusively for the "completely ignorant", in addition to which Beltrami also finds that allegory violates Aristotelian notions of probability and unity of action.<sup>171</sup> Even though such arguments do not appear in England, they are of interest as further testimony to just how central the notion of allegory is to the period's critical debates. If the allegorical theory of poetry makes it the exclusive preserve of an educated elite, pseudo-Aristotelians like Castelvetro and Beltrami cannot dismiss it without running into the other extreme, making poetry the exclusive preserve of the illiterate mob.

But these are exceptions, and anti-allegorical statements of any sort are an exceptionally rare occurrence in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century poetics. Montaigne's excursus in the *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, with its condemnation of Homeric allegoresis, is perhaps the most notable of these exceptions.<sup>172</sup> It is also of interest that we do find a few such statements in works of a markedly satirical nature. In Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*, the height of scholastic obtuseness is to "trot out some foolish popular anecdote, from the *Mirror of History* [...] or the *Deeds of the Romans*, and proceed to interpret it allegorically,

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<sup>170</sup> Quoted in Weinberg, *History*, 504.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 338-9.

<sup>172</sup> See M. de Montaigne, *Essays* (London, 1603), Gg2v-3r: "Is it possible that ever *Homer* meant all that which some make him to have meant. And that he prostrated himself to so many, and so severall shapes, as, Divines, Lawyers, Captains, Philosophers & al sorts of people else, which, how diversly and contrary soever it be, they treat of sciences, do notwithstanding wholly relie vpon him, & refer them-selves vnto him; as a Generall Maister for all offices, works, sciences, & tradesmen & an vniversal counsellor in al enterprises?"

tropologically, and anagogically”.<sup>173</sup> Only decades later, Rabelais can summarily dismiss allegorists of all ages, from Heraclitus to Poliziano, and by time of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* it is a young humanist alone who is the butt of this joke.<sup>174</sup> Thus allegory can be laughed at, but almost exclusively, it would seem, in such ambiguous contexts, from which no confident inference can be made of an author’s genuine attitude towards the subject. In much the same way, Gosson laughs, in the “plesaunt inuectiue” of his *Schoole*, at the allegories of Maximus of Tyre, and believes his reader also “will smile I am sure if you read it”. But just like Erasmus, Cervantes, and Rabelais, he never says *why*, and this is not only because he believes it to be obvious, as he clearly does, but probably also because he himself does not quite know why – because he lacks the means to fully conceptualize and express his intuitive displeasure

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<sup>173</sup> *Works*, 27: 134. Cf. [U. von Hutten, C. Rubeanus, *et al.*], *Epistolæ Obscurorum Virorum* (London, 1609), where already in the very first letter we hear of “Magister Andreas Delitzsch, a very subtle scholar [...] who lectureth in ordinary upon *Ovid* in his *Metamorphoses*, and explaineth all the fables allegorically and literally” (1.1/293). Later on, friar Conrad Dollenkopf reports that his studies at Heidelberg are going well, and that he “already knows by rote all the fables of *Ovid* in his *Metamorphoses*, and these I can expound, quadruply – to wit, naturally, literally, historically, and spiritually – and this is more than the secular poets can do”; for “nowadays”, he complains, “these Poets do but study their art literally, and do not comprehend” such “allegorizing and spiritual expositions” as he goes on to quote from the fourteenth-century *Metamorphosis Ovidiana moraliter explanata* – i.e., the fifteenth chapter of Pierre Bersuire’s *Reductorium morale*, once attributed to the Dominican Thomas Waleys, and still printed at the time of the *Epistolæ* – and which exemplify, as he explicitly asserts, “the way in which we ought to study Poetry” (1.28/343-5). Elsewhere, we learn that magister Gratius himself, the addressee of the *Epistolæ*, has complained that he has but a few pupils, and that “*Buschius* and *Caesarius* lure the students from” him, “notwithstanding that they lack [his] skill to expound the poets allegorically and to cite thereanent the Scriptures. The Devil, I trow, is in those Poets. They are the bane of the universities” (2.46/484). If, however, the precedent for this was Erasmus’ above-quoted dismissal of allegorical readings of such medieval favourites as the *Speculum historiae* or the *Gesta Romanorum*, then the authors of the *Epistolæ* gravely misunderstood his point. With Erasmus, it is not the method itself that is the problem – as discussed above, he explicitly and repeatedly recommends its application to classical poets – but its illegitimate application to the said “barbarian” texts. Indeed, the fact that the quoted passages from the *Epistolæ* mock precisely such an approach to classical poetry as Erasmus supported throughout his career is not inconsistent with his vocal disapproval of the work on other grounds, notably in the 16 August 1517 letter to Caesarius, included, against his will, in Gratius’ 1518 *Lamentationes obscurorum virorum*: “I greatly disapproved of the *Epistolæ obscurorum virorum*, right from the beginning” (*Works*, 5: 66-7), etc. Quite simply, Erasmus had no share in the Protestant hostility to allegory, and such irreverent mockery of a doctrine fundamental to his literary views – not to mention the much more forceful and damning views of Luther and other Reformers on biblical allegoresis – could have only been deeply troubling and distasteful to him.

<sup>174</sup> See Rabelais, *Gargantua*, B3r-v, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and M. de Cervantes, *The Second Part of the History of... Don Quixote* (London, 1620), K8r: among other useless books, Cervantes’ humanist scholar – “his Profession was Humanity, his Exercises and Study to make bookes for the Press” – is working on one “which I meane to call the *Metamorphosis*, or *Spanish Ouid*, of a new and rare inuention: for imitating *Ouid* in it, by way of mocking: I shew who the *Giralda* of *Seul* was, the Angell of the *Magdalena*, who was the Pipe of *Vecinguerra* of *Cordona*, who the *Buls* of *Guisando*, *Sierra Morena*, the springs of *Leganitos* and *Lauapias* in *Madrid*; not forgetting that of *Pioio*, that of the gilded pipe, and of the Abbesse, and all this with the Allegories, Metaphors, and Translations, that they delight, suspend, and instruct all in a moment”.

with the doctrine. The most he can muster comes in the more straightforward mode of the *Apologie*: allegorists, he says here, are “dissemblers”.<sup>175</sup>

It is this essentially moral charge that accounts for most, if not all, instances of anti-allegorical sentiment in the English corpus. As Herman notes, one of the stock definitions of allegory – saying one thing while meaning another – “comes perilously close to calling all allegories lying”.<sup>176</sup> Herman’s further statement that this makes allegory “a morally contested term in popular discourse” is exaggerated, yet a degree of unease is certainly detectable.<sup>177</sup> Also on record are misgivings about the readers’ capacity or willingness to correctly identify the intended allegorical meanings, especially those of contemporary topical reference: Spenser, for example, writes his “Letter of the Authors” because, “knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be construed”, he wishes to avoid “gealous opinions and misconstructions”.<sup>178</sup> Obviously, however, these are not objections to allegory as such, and in fact presume and uphold the validity of allegorical poetics.

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<sup>175</sup> “Thus making gods of them that were brute beastes, in the likenes of men, diuine goddesses of common harlots; they robbe God of his honour, diminishe his authoritie, weaken his might, & turne his seate to a stewes. By writing of vntruthes they are open liers, but if they do faine these frantike conceates to resemble somewhat els that they imagine, by speaking of one thing and thinking another, they are dissemblers” (*Ephemerides*, L5r).

<sup>176</sup> Herman, *Squitter-wits*, 23-4.

<sup>177</sup> Thus Puttenham’s famous passage on allegory, where one of the names he gives it is precisely Dissimulation, “hints at his doubts about the morality of both poetry and politics” (*Art*, 23). More precisely, Puttenham plays on the negative connotations of the term “dissimulation” in order to insert into an apparently innocuous text, an entry on allegory in a survey of rhetorical figures, a playful critique of the court. The irony, however, is that in doing so, Puttenham is himself dissimulating, himself displaying a subtle mastery of precisely that which he is supposedly criticizing. We find the same irony in Sidney’s allegory sonnet in *Astrophil and Stella*, which begins with the speaker professing to distance himself from those “who with allegory’s curious frame/ Of other’s children changelings use to make”; P. Sidney, *The Major Works*, ed. K. Duncan-Jones, rev. ed. (Oxford, 2002), 163. The metaphor of the changeling is equivalent to the straightforward charge of dissimulation; the allegorical meaning, as the opening lines of the sonnet intimate, is an illicit and fraudulent surrogate for the one genuinely intended by the author. Yet Sidney immediately undermines this by facetiously insisting that when he says “Stella”, he means “the same/ Princess of beauty for whose only sake/ The reins of love I love, though never slake”. As the names “Astrophil” and “Stella” cannot be more obviously fictional, the lines, even while they pretend to discourage it, effectively invite the reader to look for their topical significance, which was in all probability perfectly obvious to Sidney’s intended coterie audience.

<sup>178</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton with T. Suzuki and S. Fukuda, 2nd ed. (Harlow, 2007), 714. Similar statements are found in Jonson’s works, for example in the Epistle to *Volpone*: “Application is now grown a trade with many; and there are that profess to have a key for the deciphering of everything; but let wise and noble persons take heed how they be too credulous, or give leave to these invading interpreters to be over-familiar with their fames, who cunningly and often utter their own virulent malice under other men’s simplest meanings” (*Works*, 3: 29). But precisely as Dutton adds in his note to this passage, “in protesting too much”, Jonson and others who utter the same sentiment “may advertise what they purport to disown”, paralleling the ambiguous protestations of Puttenham and Sidney. Drummond’s *Informations* record Jonson’s straightforward explanations of the characters in the lost pastoral play *The May-lord*, Jonson himself figuring as “Alken” (*ibid.*, 5: 379).

We meet, then, with an inarticulate moral objection to allegory as “dissembling”, and with a certain degree of unease about the correct decoding of allegorical meaning, but not the allegorical process in itself. It is only with Francis Bacon’s discussion of poetry in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), and its revised and expanded form in *De augmentis scientiarum* (1623) – the one comprehensive statement of poetics purposely omitted from the above survey – that we arrive to a considerably more sophisticated critique of the allegorical doctrine.<sup>179</sup> In one sense, the reason is obvious: Bacon’s attitude towards poetry and allegory is different from that of his predecessors because his entire framework of human knowledge is different. However, in spite of a sizeable literature on Bacon’s poetics there is still little agreement on its postulates and its place in the history of poetic thought. The broad outlines are well known: poetry, in Bacon’s comprehensive scheme, is one of the three main branches of human learning, and is aligned with the faculty of imagination; the other two are history and philosophy, aligned with memory and reason.<sup>180</sup> Poetry is defined as being “nothing else than *Imitation of History at pleasure [historia conficta ad placitum]*”; it is divided into “narrative”, “representative”, and “parabolical”; its purpose is “to endow Humane Nature with that which *History* denies; and to give satisfaction to the Mind with, at least, the shadow of things, where the substance cannot be had”.

These are the familiar broad outlines. A more nuanced estimate of Bacon view’s depends, however, on a careful reconsideration of a number of further statements here and elsewhere in his works – notably Bacon’s approach to mythography, pursued most extensively in his 1609 *De sapientia veterum* – to which task the remainder of this chapter is

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<sup>179</sup> See F. Bacon, *Of the proficience and aduancement of Learning* (London, 1605), Ee1v-3v; *De Dignitate & Augmentis Scientiarum* (London, 1623), P2r-S3r (2.13). I will mostly refer to the revised version in *De augmentis*, quoting the contemporary translation by G. Wats – *Of the Advancement and Proficience of Learning* (Oxford, 1640), O1r-R2v (2.13) – pointing out significant differences from the 1605 version, and the 1623 Latin original, as they arise. For ease of reference, I will cite the 1605 version as *Aduancement* (with a u), the 1623 Latin version as *De augmentis*, and the 1640 translation as *Advancement* (with a v). Curiously, Bacon’s writings are absent from Plett’s *Bibliography*, in spite of the fact that the section on poetry in the *Aduancement* was anthologized in Spingarn’s *Essays*, and is routinely discussed in studies of English poetics. What is not sufficiently acknowledged, however, is the significance of the revisions to this section in *De augmentis*.

<sup>180</sup> For an overview of Bacon’s framework, see S. Kusakawa, “Bacon’s Classification of Knowledge”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon*, ed. M. Peltonen (Cambridge, 1996).



largely dedicated.<sup>181</sup> To begin with, the relevance of Bacon's inclusion of poetry among the three major branches of human learning, and its allocation to the faculty of imagination, becomes clear only when compared to prior attempts at the classification of poetry among the human faculties and sciences. Out of the terminological quandary presented by these earlier classifications, two basic tendencies can be discerned.<sup>182</sup> Fundamental to both is the premise that poetry has no subject or faculty proper to itself, from which premise two seemingly opposite but in fact perfectly compatible conclusions can be derived. According to the first, the lack of a subject matter proper to poetry means that its definition is to be sought in its medium, so poetry is classified along with the other disciplines or faculties of discourse comprising the trivium, especially rhetoric.<sup>183</sup> According to the second, the lack of proper subject matter means that poetry encompasses the subject matter of all disciplines, making it the supreme science. While superficially at odds, it is easy to see that the two lines of argument – that poetry does not have a subject, and that it encompasses all subjects; that it is the handmaiden of other disciplines, and that it is their mistress – differ only in emphasis.<sup>184</sup> Common to both is the inability to conceive of poetry, or “imaginative literature” and “art” more broadly, as an autonomous or at least semi-autonomous field of activity.

While such elaborate classifications as found in the work of Italian critics do not appear in England, the broad outlines are the same. Rhetoric on the side of the *verba*, philosophy, especially moral, on the side of the *res*, and history, itself similarly suspended between the two, are the most important coordinates in locating poetry on the map of human

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<sup>181</sup> See F. Bacon, *De sapientia veterum liber* (London, 1609); I will mostly be quoting from the contemporary English translation by A. Gorges, *The Wisdom of the Ancients* (London, 1619).

<sup>182</sup> For an analysis of the elaborate efforts at such classifications by sixteenth-century Italian critics, see Weinberg, *History*, 1-37.

<sup>183</sup> However divided and named, and sometimes with the addition of history. Cf. Weinberg, *History*, 2: “Since poetry used words as its medium, it belonged with all the logical disciplines – with logic, dialectic, rhetoric, and sophistic – and with such arts as grammar and history, all of which also used words. [...] Renaissance theorists in a sense never abandoned this classification, although the sciences associated with poetry appear in different groupings and combinations. Throughout the sixteenth century we find systems modelled on this essentially medieval pattern.”

<sup>184</sup> The perfect illustration of this is found in a 1551 lecture by the Italian critic B. Varchi, who first declares poetry to be a verbal faculty rather than an art, since it has no proper subject, and is thus almost indistinct from the other verbal faculties – “dialectic, logic, and poetics are almost the same thing, not being different substantially but only in accidents” – and then later in this same lecture claims that poetry contains “in itself necessarily all the sciences, all the arts, and all the faculties at once, whence it is more noble, more delightful, and more perfect than each one of them in itself” (quoted in Weinberg, *History*, 8-9).

culture. The distinction between form and content, *verba* and *res*, is fundamental and absolute. A particularly illustrative passage from John Hoskins' *Directions for Speech and Style* (c.1600) may be quoted at length:

An emblem, an allegory, a similitude, a fable, and a poet's tale differ thus: an EMBLEM is but the one part of the similitude, the other part (viz., the application) expressed indifferently and jointly in one sentence, with words some proper to the one part, some to the other; a SIMILITUDE hath two sentences, of several proper terms compared; a FABLE is a similitude acted by fiction in beasts; a POET'S TALE, for the most part, by gods and men. In the former example, plant a castle compassed with rivers and let the words be, *Nec obsidione nec cuniculis* (neither by siege nor undermining): that is an emblem, the proper terms of the one part. Lay it as it is in Sir Philip S[idney]: *Philoclea's virtue*, the proper terms of the one part; *environed, rivers, battered, undermined*, the terms of the other part; all these terms in one sentence and it is an allegory. Let it be this:

There was a lamb in a castle, and an elephant and a fox besieged it. The elephant would have assailed the castle but he would not swim over the river. The fox would make a hole in the earth to get under it, but he feared the river would have sunk in upon him and drowned him.

Then it is a fable. Let Spenser tell you such a tale of a Faery Queen, and Ovid of Diana, and then it is a poet's tale. But utter it thus in one sentence:

Even as a castle compassed about with rivers cannot be battered or undermined,

and this in another:

Philoclea, defended round about with virtuous resolutions, could neither be forced nor surprised by deceit,

then it is a similitude in his own nature, – which is the ground of all emblems, allegories, fables, and fictions.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> J. Hoskins, *Directions for Speech and Style*, ed. H. H. Hudson (Princeton, 1935), 9-10.

Hoskins' passage presents us with the dominant sixteenth-century theory and its corresponding educational model in condensed form. At its basis, both conceptually and chronologically, are collections of moral maxims, similar to the motto Hoskins derives from Sidney's *Arcadia*, learned in the lower grammar school forms.<sup>186</sup> These are the ultimate model of the *res*, which is understood to remain unchanged regardless of how one manipulates the increasingly complex *verba* by means of which it is expressed. To interpret a work of literature is thus to recover the unchanged *res* from the protean variety of the *verba*. Neither is endemic to poetry: the *res* belongs properly to philosophy, while the province of the *verba* is shared by all of the arts of the trivium. The specific difference of poetry can thus only be located in its configuration of these two components, and the interpretive process this entails. Of this process there can be several levels, three of which – verse and figurative language, example, and allegory – are usually discernible.<sup>187</sup> But again, since figurative language and example are just as much the property of rhetoric as of poetry – and since verse too, at least for those who followed Aristotle on this matter, was insufficient as the specific difference of poetic discourse – the distinction, if any, ultimately came down to allegory.<sup>188</sup>

What is Bacon's relation to this received view? Scholarship on Bacon's thought has often reflected on its transitional character, in which tradition and innovation are often found side by side, and his poetics is no exception. Indeed, Bacon himself seems to have understood it as such: "searching and pursuing in our Partition the true veines of Learning", his account

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<sup>186</sup> See P. Sidney, *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (London, 1590), Tt6r: "*Philoclea* (though humbly seated) was so inuironed with sweete riuers of cleere virtue, as could neither be battred, nor vndermined".

<sup>187</sup> Cf. also Hoskins' treatment of literary character, a variation on the commonplace identification of Aristotle's notion of the "universal" with allegory. Hoskins clearly envisages the process of "characterization" as essentially allegorical, just as he views fiction as "figured" by definition: "he that will truly set a man down in a figured story must first learn truly to set down an humor, a passion, a virtue, a vice, and therein keeping decent proportion add but names and knit together the accidents and encounters" (*Directions*, 41). Thus every character in Sidney's *Arcadia* is stripped to a type or abstract concept in a manner almost indistinguishable from allegoresis: "pleasant idle retiredness in King Basilius, and the dangerous end of it; unfortunate valor in Plangus; courteous valor in Amphialus; proud valor in Anaxius", etc.

<sup>188</sup> Note the implicit equation, just as in Sidney and elsewhere, of Hoskins' "fiction" and "poet's tale" with the allegorical mode employed by Spenser, and commonly attributed to Ovid. Cf. also Scott's *Model of Poesy*, where a deliberate attempt is made to determine the specific difference of poetry, distinguishing it "from all faculties that consist not in feigning or imitation – as that of oratory, history, and the sciences – or feign not style – as painting, carving, and the like" (11). While this may sound as anticipating Bacon's position, and the position of modern aesthetics more generally, ultimately Scott can only reproduce the traditional view: poetry is "an art of imitation, or an instrument of reason, that consists in laying down the rules and way how in style to feign or represent things, with delight to teach and to move us to good" (6); the poet "proposeth his sugared meats to unjudicious wits for the most part, and is therefore called the *vulgar philosopher*" (82).

of poetry is to proceed without, “in many points, [...] giving place to custome, and the receaved Divisions”.<sup>189</sup> Where the received opinion is deemed “true”, it will be retained, and where not, a new one will be sought. The first, most obvious, and furthest-reaching break with tradition is the categorical separation of poetry from philosophy and its alignment with the imagination. The threefold division of the mental faculties into memory, imagination and reason is an ancient commonplace, but the correlation of the three faculties with their respective arts is apparently a sixteenth-century development, and it has been suggested that Bacon here draws on Juan Huarte’s influential *Examen de ingenios*, first published in 1575. If so, Huarte’s influence extended only to the broadest, structural level, for in their substance Huarte’s correlations are not merely different from, but irreconcilable with Bacon’s. Notably, Huarte also aligns poetry with the “imagination”, yet to him “imagination” and “understanding” are antithetical, whereas to Bacon they are distinct and, crucially, complementary.<sup>190</sup> Bacon does not sever poetry from reason in order to denigrate it, nor do the specific powers of poetry – which is capable of “proportioning the shewes of things to the desires of the mind; and not submitting the mind to things, as *Reason* and *History* doe” – make it superior to the other two principal sciences, as they do for Sidney and other theorists of the period.<sup>191</sup> Each has its proper place in what Bacon famously describes by his tree simile, “because the Partition of Sciences are not like severall lines that meet in one angle; but

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<sup>189</sup> *Advancement*, O1r.

<sup>190</sup> “From a good imagination”, says Huarte, “spring all the Arts and Sciences, which consist in figure, correspondence, harmonie, and proportion”; J. Huarte, *The Examination of mens Wits* (London, 1594), H4r. This includes rhetoric and the arts – “Poetrie, Eloquence, Musicke, and the skill of preaching”, “Paynting, drawing, writing, reading” – but also “the practice of Phisicke, the Mathematical, Astrologie, [...] the gouerning of a Common-wealth, the art of Warfare” (H7v-8v; by “writing” and “reading” are meant the arts of handwriting and reading aloud). By “imagination”, as his definition and the ensuing discussion show, Huarte appears to mean something like abstract intelligence; thus an uneducated man, possessed of “an ill vnderstanding, and a bad memorie, but a good imagination”, is a natural talent at chess (H8v-I1r). However we define Bacon’s “imagination”, it is plainly something other than abstract intelligence. Huarte also places a special emphasis on poetry, placing it deliberately at the head of the list – but again for very different reasons than Bacon. First of all, “poetry” is to Huarte equivalent to “the art of versifying” (H6v), which Bacon straightforwardly dismisses – see Bacon, *Advancement*, O1r: “for *Verse*, is a kind of Stile and Forme of Elocution, and pertaines not to *Matter*; for a true Narration may be composed in *Verse*; and a *Faigned*, in *Prose*”. More importantly, Huarte says he is placing poetry at the head of the “imaginative” disciplines “not by chance nor for want of consideration, but thereby to giue notice, how farre off, those who haue a speciall gift in poetry, are from vnderstanding”. The English translation of Huarte’s *Examen* was made from an intermediary Italian translation; all cited passages have been checked against an early edition of the Spanish original – *Examen de ingenios* (Huesca, 1580) – and show no important deviations in meaning. The translation had at least nine further editions, the last in 1734.

<sup>191</sup> *Advancement*, O2r.

rather like branches of trees that meet in one stemme, which stemme for some dimension and space is entire and continued, before it break, and part it selfe into armes and boughes”.<sup>192</sup>

Furthermore, poetry is the only art Bacon classifies under the domain of “imagination”, and the reason he gives for doing so makes it clear that by “imagination” he means, among other things, more or less what the word means today in similar contexts. Poetry, he writes, is “*a kind of Learning in words restrained; in matter loose and licenc’d*; so that it is referred, as we said at first, to the *Imagination*; which useth to devise, and contrive, unequall and unlawfull Matches and divorces of things”.<sup>193</sup> Bacon assigns poetry to the imagination, then – we can drop the quote marks now, at least in this context – for the same reason we still speak of *imaginative literature* when distinguishing between a particular kind of writing that we feel to be a form of art rather than merely cultured or “lettered” discourse. Nor is Bacon’s imagination a mental aberration, a *furor*, whether in the negative emphasis, coupling poetic *phantasia* with that of the lunatic and the lover, or the positive emphasis of Neoplatonic doctrine. Nor can Bacon’s view be rightly compared, as many critics have done, to Sidney’s more famous passage on the golden world of poetry, for as with Huarte, the differences are far more important than the similarities. As discussed above, Sidney champions poetic licence only on the corollary of seeing all poetry as offering moral or philosophical instruction, and therefore, in the final instance, allegorical in nature; the greater the licence the poet takes, the more it calls for allegoresis (the stock “argument from

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., R2v.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., O1r. In the earlier version, this is followed by an abbreviated citation from Horace’s *Ars poetica*: “*Pictoribus atque poetis &c.*” (*Advancement*, Ee1v). The passage in Horace runs: “‘Painters and poets have always enjoyed recognized rights to venture on what they will.’ Yes, we know; indeed we ask and grant this permission turn and turn about. But it doesn’t mean that fierce and gentle can be united, snakes paired with birds or lambs with tigers”; *Criticism*, ed. Russel and Winterbottom, 279. Probably Bacon was attracted to the aphorism on the painters and the poets because in itself, without Horace’s addition, it offered a succinct ancient confirmation of his own views. Obviously, however, Horace’s comment runs exactly counter Bacon’s insistence that poetic licence extends even to precisely such “unequall and unlawfull Matches and divorces” as Horace forbids. In fact, Bacon’s statement reads like a deliberate negation of Horace’s strictures. The removal of the citation in the *De augmentis* is thus very likely the result of Bacon’s wish to disassociate himself from Horace’s view, with which the anonymous aphorism on poetic licence was inextricably linked. On the nature of Bacon’s “imagination” in reference to poetry see also the initial definition at the beginning of Book 2 of the *De augmentis*: “*Poesy*, in that sense we have expounded it, *is likewise of Individuals* [i.e. like history, dealing with actual particulars, and unlike philosophy, dealing with universals], *fancied to the similitude of those things which in true History are recorded*, yet so as often it exceeds measure; and those things which in Nature would never meet, nor come to passe, *Poesy* composeth and introduceth at pleasure, even as *Painting* doth: which indeed is the work of the Imagination” (*Advancement*, K3r).

absurdity” which, as discussed below, Bacon himself espouses in his idiosyncratic theory of mythographical exegesis, but not in his theory of poetry). What Sidney, from the point of view of modern aesthetics, gives with one hand, he takes with the other. Exactly like Hoskins’, and exactly unlike Bacon’s, Sidney’s poetic licence extends solely to the superficial layer of the *verba*, while the *res* remains firmly in the domain of philosophy. Whatever similarities they may exhibit, this is where the theories irrevocably diverge: Bacon’s poet simply cannot, by definition, be a “popular philosopher”.<sup>194</sup>

This is not to say that Bacon wholly dispenses with the inherited view of poetry as a soluble compound of *res* and *verba*, or that of poetry as conducive to morals, or indeed of poetry as a vehicle for the esoteric transmission of philosophic content, but he profoundly transforms these views. With respect to the *res-verba* distinction, he does so, firstly, by taking a genuinely rather than merely pseudo-Aristotelian or rhetorical, view of the two elements, and secondly, by assigning them to separate disciplines and mental faculties.<sup>195</sup> “*Poesy*”, he writes, “is taken in a double sense; *as it respects Words; or as it respects Matter*” – but, he continues:

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<sup>194</sup> Sidney, *Defence*, 87.

<sup>195</sup> There are strong indications that Bacon’s revisions of the poetry section in *De augmentis* are influenced by a reading of the *Poetics* in the 1623 Latin translation by the eminent London physician T. Goulston: *Aristotelis de poetica liber* (London, 1623). The Aristotelian influence in Bacon’s poetics is generally noted, and some commentators have made claims for Bacon’s direct knowledge of the *Poetics*. However, since Bacon never cites or refers to Aristotle’s work, or any other authority – as noted above, a citation from Horace appears the *Advancement*, but is removed in *De augmentis* – direct knowledge is difficult to demonstrate. Dowlin believed that Bacon “must have been familiar” with Riccoboni’s Latin translation, first published in 1579 and included in the 1590 Lyons *Opera omnia* edited by I. Casaubon, but without persuasive evidence; see C. M. Dowlin, “Plot as an Essential in Poetry”, *RES*, o.s., 17 (1941): 166-83, p. 171. The section on poetry in *De augmentis* appears to contain, however, several verbal echoes of Goulston’s Latin translation, which is the first English edition of the *Poetics* in any language or form. Besides these verbal echoes, specified in notes 201 and 203 below, several further circumstances corroborate this inference. First of all, the time-frame allows for Bacon’s reading of Goulston’s translation, which was entered on the Stationers’ Register on 23 January 1623, nine months before *De augmentis*, entered on 13 October. Thus the first English edition of the *Poetics*, in an accessible and methodical Latin translation, opening with a diagrammatic representation of the treatise’s contents, appeared precisely when Bacon was at work, or was about to begin work, on *De augmentis* (his preceding publication, the *Historia vitae et mortis*, was entered on the Stationers’ Register on 18 December 1622). Secondly, the passages in which traces of Goulston’s translation seem to appear are all additions made in *De augmentis*, absent from the early version in the *Advancement*, which would be consistent with them resulting from Bacon’s reading of this translation. Thirdly, these apparent verbal echoes come from precisely those sections of the *Poetics* which would have been of greatest interest to Bacon – ch. 4, on plot (“*Fabula, Qua & Qualis*”, C4v), and ch. 15, on epic (“*De Epopœia*”, 11r) – which, again, the tree diagram of the contents would make easy to identify and locate. Finally, Bacon knew Goulston, or at least knew of him, as Goulston sent to Bacon a large-paper presentation copy of his previous translation of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* – *Aristotelis de Rhetorica... Libri* (London, 1619) – now in the British Library, General Reference Collection, C.48.g.7. Goulston’s inscription contains no information on his relationship with Bacon; it is reproduced in T. F. Dibdin’s *Introduction*, 4th ed. (London, 1827), 1: 318-19. Although there is no evidence that Goulston did the same with his *Poetics*, it is at least a possibility.

In the *first sense*, it is a kind of Character of speech; for *Verse*, is a kind of Stile and Forme of Elocution, and pertaines not to *Matter*; for a *true Narration* may be composed in *Verse*; and a *Faigned*, in *Prose*. In the *latter sense*, we have already determined it, a *Principall member of Learning*, and have placed it next to *History*; seeing it is nothing else than *Imitation of History at pleasure*. Wherefore searching and pursuing in our Partition the true veines of Learning; and in many points, not giving place to custome, and the *received Divisions*; we have dismissed *Satyres*, and *Elegies*, and *Epigrammes*, and *Odes*, and the like, and referred them to *Philosophy* and *Arts of Speech*. Under the name of *Poesy*, we treat only of *History Faigned at Pleasure*.<sup>196</sup>

As with philosophy, the knot which had for centuries tied poetry to rhetoric is severed in one bold stroke. The two remain related, as a number of commentators have rightly insisted, but while rhetoric remains an aspect of poetry, poetry is no longer an aspect of rhetoric. In terms of the traditional configuration, poetry is now promoted to “a *Principall member of Learning*”, aligned to its proper faculty (imagination) and assigned its proper subject (fiction), while rhetoric is demoted to a function of those “*Faculties of the Mind of Man*” that are auxiliary to all three “principal” disciplines.<sup>197</sup> A further consequence of this is the exclusion of lyric poetry from the domain of “poesy” and its relegation to rhetoric. This statement, added in *De augmentis*, has been a cause of needless dismay to some modern commentators.<sup>198</sup> Bacon’s exclusion of the lyric is not a value judgement, but simply the logical conclusion to be derived from Bacon’s premises at a time when the modern notion of lyric poetry, of a lyric “voice” or “speaker” as a fictional persona distinct from the actual

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<sup>196</sup> *Advancement*, O1r.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, Ee1r. Cf. Kusukawa, “Classification”, 54. See also J. L. Harrison, “Bacon’s View of Rhetoric, Poetry, and the Imagination”, *HLQ* 20 (1957), 109-10: it is true that the imagination remains “the principal mental agent of both poetry and rhetoric”, but this does not mean that that Bacon “willingly sacrificed neat division in order to outline the dual proctorial duties of the Imagination”. Explicitly addressing this issue, Bacon writes that he sees “no reason why we should depart from the former Division: For the *Imagination* commonly doth not produce Sciences; for *Poesy* which hath ever been attributed to the *Imagination*, is to be estimated rather a play of the wit, than a knowledge” (*Advancement*, Ee2r). He thinks, that is, in terms of different and complementary uses of the imagination. Even so, the fact remains that only poetry is *classified* under the faculty of the imagination, and that it thus finds itself at the very top, and rhetoric at the very bottom of the tree of knowledge, a polyvalent mental “faculty” classified as a sub-sub-sub-sub-sub-subdivision of philosophy.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. Harrison again, insisting that Bacon’s words here do not “mean that satire, elegy, epigram, and ode are relegated to rhetoric” (“View”, 121, n. 17) – but what else might they mean?

author, is at best only beginning to emerge.<sup>199</sup> The defining quality of Bacon's "poesy" is *fiction*, and he simply does not see the lyric kinds – many of which were in his day still commonly used for a variety of overtly non-fictional occasional purposes – as fictional discourse, but rather as rhetorically embellished statements of the actual thoughts and sentiments of actual people. Even today, when a definition of imaginative literature that would exclude the lyric is inconceivable, the colloquial use of the term *fiction* in the English language continues to denote *narrative* fiction. In any case, Bacon is not trying to ban odes and epigrams, but merely to assign them to their proper place in his division of knowledge.

Bacon's Aristotelianism is tried, however, by the paramount question of poetry's relation to morality and knowledge. Here we do see him stray into pseudo-Aristotelian territory, moralizing some of Aristotle's structural concepts, but again with characteristic twists in emphasis which distinguish him from his predecessors. Thus he notes that "a strong Argument may be drawn from *Poesy*, that a more stately greatnesse [*Magnitudinem*] of things; a more Perfect Order [*Ordinem*]; and a more beautifull [*pulchram*] variety delights the soule of Man, than any way can be found in Nature, since the Fall".<sup>200</sup> There would appear to be an echo of the *Poetics* here, specifically the claim, in the chapter on plot, that "Pulchrum in Magnitudine & Ordine manet".<sup>201</sup> Of course, when Aristotle says that "Beauty is a matter of size and order",<sup>202</sup> these terms have a purely structural meaning, whereas Bacon turns them into affective and moral qualities, redefining structural "magnitude" as affective "greatnesse", and structural "Order" as poetic justice. Again, however, the traditional element in Bacon's poetics undergoes significant reconstruction and transformation: while the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice are the near-universal refrain of sixteenth and seventeenth-century

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<sup>199</sup> See R. Greene, "The Lyric", in *History*, ed. Norton, for a discussion of the "especially problematic" place of the lyric in premodern poetics. According to Greene, the notion of the lyric as fictional develops only gradually in the course of the sixteenth century, and the theory of the lyric remains "only intermittently separable from rhetorical theory [...] until about 1600" (217).

<sup>200</sup> *Advancement*, O1v.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. the original version of the passage in the 1605 *Aduancement*, which has "a more ample Greatnesse, a more exact Goodnesse; and a more *absolute* varietie" (Ee1v, emphasis mine). The replacement of "Goodnesse" with "order", and of the more "absolute" with the more "beautiful" variety, would seem consistent with the influence of Aristotle's passage, the aphoristic clarity of which might have recommended it to Bacon's attention. The above quotation is from Goulston's version (D1r), but very similar renderings of this place are found in other contemporary Latin translations, most closely Vettori's (Florence, 1560), G6v, "pulchrum enim in magnitudine & ordine manet".

<sup>202</sup> *Poetics*, 1450b.



criticism, in Bacon's view poetic justice is only one of three ways in which the fictional surpasses the factual.<sup>203</sup>

Another example of this is found in the sentence continuing from the passage cited in the preceding note. In the *Advancement*, Bacon here writes: "So as it appeareth that *Poesie* serueth and conferreth to Magnanimitie, Moraltie, and to delectation."<sup>204</sup> In *De augmentis*, the sentence is revised as follows: "Adeo vt *Poesis* ista, non solum ad Delectationem, sed etiã ad Animi Magnitudinem, & ad Mores conferat."<sup>205</sup> Four things are to be noted: first, the order of the three items is rearranged so that *delectatio* is moved from third to first place in the sequence; secondly, this rearrangement is reinforced by changes in syntax and emphasis ("not only... but also"); thirdly, *serve*, a verb denoting a definite subordinate relation between poetry and the three mentioned categories is dropped, leaving the much less definite *conferre*; fourthly, while *delectatio* and *animi magnitudo* correspond exactly to their equivalents in the earlier version, *mores* would probably, considering Bacon's usage and arguments elsewhere in *De augmentis*, be better rendered here as "manners" than as "morality" or "morals".<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> "Wherefore seeing the Acts and events, which are the subject of true *History*, are not of that amplitude, as to content the mind of Man; *Poesy* is ready at hand to faine *Acts* more *Heroicall*. Because *true History* reports the successes of businesse, not proportionable to the merit of Virtues and Vices; *Poesy* corrects it, and presents events and Fortunes according to desert, and according to the Law of Providence: because *true History*, through the frequent satiety and similitude of Things, workes a distast and misprision in the mind of Man; *Poesy* cheereth and refreshes the soule; chanting things rare, and various, and full of vicissitudes" (*Advancement*, O1v). The cited passage might contain a more definite echo of Goulston's translation of the *Poetics*. In Bacon's Latin original, the final part of the above quotation reads: "Cum Historia vera, obuia rerum satietae & similitudine, Animæ humanæ fastidio sit; reficit eam *Poesis*, inexpectata, & varia, & vicissitudinum plena canens" (*De augmentis*, P2v, underlining mine). Cf. Goulston's translation of the sentence on the requirement of variety in the *Poetics*, ch. 24: "Deinde, vt et is, qui Audit, variae mutetur, et eius, qui Dicit, oratio, Episodijs dilatetur *inter se* Dissimilibus: Cum. n. statim id satiety, quod Simile est; facit, vt Tragœdiæ, præ fastidio, exhibentur e Scena" (I2v, underlining mine). I have consulted the major Latin translations preceding Goulston's – namely, Valla's [1498] (in Aristotle *et al.*, *Rhetorica Aristotelis* [Venice, 1515]), Pazzi's (1536; repr. Basel, 1537), Vettori's, Riccoboni's (Venice, 1579), Heinsius' [1610] (Leiden, 1611) – and all of these differ significantly from Goulston's in this place. Notably, neither contains any form of the words *varius* or *fastidium*, found, alongside forms of *satietas* and *similitudo/similis* in both Bacon and Goulston. A methodical analysis of the two texts could possibly uncover more definite evidence. Bywater's translation of Aristotle's passage reads: "This then is a gain to the epic, tending to give it grandeur, and also variety of interest and room for episodes of diverse kinds. Uniformity of incident by the satiety it soon creates is apt to ruin tragedies on the stage" (*Poetics*, 1459b).

<sup>204</sup> *Advancement*, Ee2r.

<sup>205</sup> *De augmentis*, P2v.

<sup>206</sup> The two English translations of *De augmentis* fail to render Bacon's revisions, reproducing vocabulary from the earlier version, apparently on the premise that Bacon is not rewriting the passage but simply translating it into Latin, so that the best translation is a simple reversion to Bacon's own English. This is particularly clear in Wats' rendering – "So as *Poesy* serveth and conferreth to Delectation, Magnanimity, and Morality" (*Advancement*, O1v) – which not only renders *mores* as "Morality", but also keeps the gratuitous "serveth", showing how easy it was even for a contemporary reader to conflate the subtleties of Bacon's positions with the more standard views of the period. The version in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. J. Spedding, R. L. Ellis, and

What can at first seem as just another variation on the standard Horatian formula of *prodesse et delectare*, or the various Ciceronian triads of *probere-conciliare-vocare*, *conciliare-docere-movere*, *conciliare-docere-concitare*, and so on, is thus revealed, especially in the revised version, as a statement of a very different, far less orthodox position.<sup>207</sup> To say that poetry “serveth and conferreth to Magnanimitie, Moraltie, and to delectation”, is not quite the same as saying that is the task of poetry to teach and delight; to revise this into a statement that poetry confers (but no longer serves) not only to delectation, but also to magnanimity and manners (but no longer morality) – the former primary and obvious, as the revised order and syntax would seem to imply, the latter secondary and requiring special emphasis – is to depart even further from the conventional formulas.<sup>208</sup> Most importantly, delectation, magnanimity,

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D. D. Heath (London, 1852-61), 4: 316, is closer to the Latin original, but it too renders *mores* as “morality”: “So that this Poesy conduces not only to delight but also to magnanimity and morality.” Although there is at least one instance where Bacon himself translates “Morall matters” as “moribus” (*Aduancement*, D2v; *De augmentis*, D1v), it is striking that we do not find a single instance of such usage in Bacon’s treatment of moral philosophy in Book 7 of *De augmentis*. Nine relevant instances of *mores* occur (*Advancement*, Aaa2r, Aaa4v, Bbb2r, Bbb3r-4r, Ccc1r, Ccc2r), neither of which can be meaningfully rendered into English as *morals*; Wats translates them as *manners* (*Advancement*, Xx3v, Xx3v, Yy4v, Zz1r, Zz3r), *carriage* (Zz2r, Zz3r), and *disposition* (Yy2r). *Mores* also appears in a quote from Cicero, “*abeunt studia in mores*” (*De augmentis*, Bbb4r), which Bacon himself elsewhere translates using “manners” (*Aduancement*, D2v). By contrast, in Book 7 of *De augmentis* Bacon consistently refers to the discipline as *ethica* and *moralis philosophia* or *moralis doctrina*, and to “Virtutes Morales”, “*Axiomata Moralia*”, “*Rerum Moralium*” (*De augmentis*, Xx4v, Yy2v), etc. Furthermore, Bacon explicitly discusses poetry’s relation to moral philosophy in Book 7. Discussing the passions, for example, he notes that poets and historians are “the best Doctors of *this knowledge*”, in whose work “we may finde painted and dissected to the life, how affections are to be stirred up and kindled” (*Advancement*, Yy3r), and so on. However, these works, while useful to moral philosophy, are not to be seen as properly partaking of it, as is made clear in a longer excursus on the knowledge of “the *diverse Characters of mens natures or dispositions*”, which, Bacon explains, is not concerned with “those common Proclivities to virtues and vices; or Perturbations and passions, but those which are more intrinsique and radicall”, and which he claims to be “neglected or slightly past over, by writers Moral and Political”, but which is found, among other places, in the works of poets, albeit in exaggerated form: “So among the Poets, Heroicall, Satyricall, Tragedians, Comedians, you shall finde every where, the Images of wits, althoe commonly with excesse and beyound the bounds of Truth” (Yy1v). Crucially, however, Bacon explicitly insists that this poetic depiction of manners is only raw matter for moral philosophy to work with: “*Neither would we*, that those *Characters* in the *Ethiques* (as it is with Historians, Poets, and in common speech,) should be accepted as perfit politique Images; but rather as the first draughts and rude lineaments of those Images, which compounded and commixt, constitute any resemblances whatsoever; how many and of what sort they may be; and how they are connext and subordinate with another: that there may be made, as it were, an artificiall and accurate dissection of natures and dispositions; and a discovery of the secret inclinations of Individuall tempers; and that from a knowledge thereof, precepts of cure may be more pertinently prescribed” (Yy2r).

<sup>207</sup> See Cicero, *De oratore* (1942; repr. Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 2.115 (“the proof [*probemus*] of our allegations, the winning of our hearers’ favour [*conciliemus*], and the rousing [*vocemus*] of their feelings”), 2.121 (“the winning over [*conciliuntur*], the instruction [*doceantur*] and the stirring [*moveantur*] of men’s minds”), 2.129 (“first the winning over [*conciliandorum*] of men’s favour, secondly their enlightenment [*docendorum*], thirdly their excitement [*conciliandorum*]”). For other related instances and a discussion of this terminology, see L. Calboli Montefusco, “Aristotle and Cicero on the *officia oratoris*”, in *Peripatetic Rhetoric after Aristotle*, ed. W. W. Fortenbaugh and D. C. Mirhady (New Brunswick, 1994).

<sup>208</sup> In the 1605 *Aduancement*, this whole passage relates to poesy as such, while in *De augmentis* it appears in what is nominally the discussion of “representative” or epic poesy. Hartmann cites the above sentence out of

and manners are not the essential and defining ends of poetry; those ends have already been established, without recourse to any such categories, as “endow[ing] Humane Nature with that which *History* denies” it, and “giv[ing] satisfaction to the Mind with, at least, the shadow of things, where the substance cannot be had”. The shift from *morality* to *mores* is especially significant here, bringing the section on poetics in fuller accord with Bacon’s map of knowledge, as is the removal of the quotation from Horace, consistent with what is plainly an attempt to break out of the traditional paradigm.

It is much the same with Bacon’s treatment of allegorical poetry, at first sight a particularly problematic and contradictory aspect of his poetics. In the *Aduancement* Bacon gives a largely negative estimate of the allegorical tradition, for which he is celebrated in the earlier scholarship of Spingarn and others. He concedes that allegorical interpretations of ancient myths do “fall out sometimes with great felicitie”, and gives a few brief examples. “Neuerthelesse”, he continues,

in many the like incouters, I doe rather think that the fable was first, and the exposition deuised, then that the Morall was first, & thereupon the fable framed. For I finde it was an auncient vanitie in *Chrisippus*, that troubled himselfe with great contention to fasten the assertions of the *Stoicks* vpon fictions of the ancient Poets: But yet that all the Fables and fictions of the Poets, were but pleasure and not figure, I interpose no opinion. Surely of those Poets which are now extant, euen *Homer* himselfe, (notwithstanding he was made a kinde of Scripture, by the later Schooles of the Grecians) yet I should without any difficultie pronounce, that his Fables had no such inwardnesse in his owne meaning: But what they might haue, vpon a more

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context, in an attempt to argue that the version in the *De augmentis* is “completely restructured”, and that these lines now refer only to “representative” poetry and not poetry as such; see A.-M. Hartmann, “Light from Darkness”, *The Seventeenth Century* 26 (2011): 203-20, p. 213. She stresses the formulation “this poetry” (“*Poesis ista*”), interpreting it as referring to “representative” as opposed to other kinds of poetry, but the flow of the passage does not support such a reading. “This poetry” must refer to that poetry discussed in the sentences immediately preceding, which remain substantially the same as in the *Aduancement*, and continue to speak indiscriminately of “poesy”. A further reason why “this poetry” cannot refer only to “representative” poetry is that this would deny the possibility of dramatic and “parabolic” poetry also conducing to magnanimity and morality, which is clearly not Bacon’s point, as further discussed below.

originall tradition, is not easie to affirme, for he was not the inuentor of many of them.<sup>209</sup>

As research has now well established, the crucial element in Bacon's interpretations of ancient fables is this distinction between the oldest mythological texts actually available to the interpreter, the poems of Homer and Hesiod, and the allegorical fables of a much earlier date, believed to underlie them in a partly garbled form.<sup>210</sup> The Greek poets retell ancient myths that have been handed down to them, but they do so without understanding their allegorical meanings, and hence in multiple and inevitably corrupt versions. The task is thus no longer to interpret the extant ancient poems but rather to reconstruct and interpret these more ancient myths which underlie them. The comparative method by which the true form of the myths is to be uncovered, at least in theory, is rightly described by Hartmann as "akin to philology" – I would go further and say it *is* philology – and can also be seen as a precursor of later approaches to comparative mythology.<sup>211</sup> "[S]eeing they are diuersly related by Writers that liued neere about one and the self same time", the Greek versions of the fables are manifestly corrupt, but they still have certain things in common; concluding that this matter common to otherwise disparate versions "deriued from precedent memorials", Bacon believes he has found a way – a naively philological way, by modern standards, but philological nevertheless – to reconstructing the lost original.<sup>212</sup>

This approach has thus far not been traced to any direct source – although Conti would seem to come closer than has yet been noted<sup>213</sup> – yet in broad terms it can be seen to

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<sup>209</sup> Bacon, *Advancement*, Ee3r-v. One obvious source here is Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*, 1.15, where the allegories of the Stoic Chrysippus are mocked by the Epicurean Velleius for "mak[ing] out that even the earliest poets of antiquity, who had no notion of these doctrines, were really Stoics"; Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* (1933; repr. Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 39.

<sup>210</sup> The significance of this appears to have eluded Lemmi, who reports it without comment, but is recognized by Carman Garner, and more recently by Borris, Lewis, and Hartmann: see C. W. Lemmi, *The Classic Deities in Bacon* (Baltimore, 1933), 43; B. Carman Garner, "Francis Bacon, Natalis Comes and the Mythological Tradition", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 264-91, pp. 276-6; Borris, *Allegory*, 19; R. Lewis, "Francis Bacon, Allegory and the Uses of Myth", *RES* 61 (2010): 360-89, pp. 378-81; Hartmann, "Light", 210.

<sup>211</sup> Hartmann, "Light", 210.

<sup>212</sup> *Wisdom*, A9v.

<sup>213</sup> In Conti there is also a split, although it involves a shorter span of time and is not between Greeks and non-Greeks – even though Greeks are said to have learned allegory from the Egyptians – but rather between two generations of Greeks. See *Natalis Conti's "Mythologiae"*, ed. J. Mulryan and S. Brown (Tempe, 2006), 1-2, 15: "In fact not so many years before the times of Plato, Aristotle, and other philosophers, the ancients did not

constitute a blend of at least four major lines of influence: firstly, the vast tradition of mythological and literary allegoresis, omnipresent, as discussed above, in the literary culture of Bacon's day; secondly, the tradition of rationalist mythography exemplified by the works of Palaephatus, Heraclitus ("the Paradoxographer"), and others, and later on by numerous Christian euhemerists, explaining myths and mythical figures as distorted accounts of real figures and events; thirdly, the doctrine of the wisdom of the ancients – *prisca theologia* or *sapientia*, or *sapientia veterum*, as Bacon styles it – an profound knowledge attributed to such oriental figures as Hermes Trismegistus or Zoroaster, believed to have been contemporary with or to have even predated Moses; and fourthly, biblical typology, an approach to biblical hermeneutics parallel and, especially in Protestant contexts, rival to biblical allegoresis. From allegory Bacon inherits the view of classical myth as a repository of hidden lore; from rationalist mythography he adopts the premise that the classical myths, in their present form, contain unintentionally garbled content which accounts for their origin, but needs to be carefully disentangled from later, purely fabulous accretions; from the esoteric traditions he adopts the premise that this garbled content is not, as it was for the rationalists, a trivial factual event – the centaurs are really a distorted account of skilled horseback archers, the

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openly teach the principles of philosophy: instead they found a secret mythological disguise for disseminating these truths. For after the Greeks had brought this hidden philosophical method, which they imported from Egypt into their country, they started to use stories to conceal their philosophical directives. [...] At a later time they [i.e. the Greeks] confused this great muddle of gods in fictions, since each one invented whatever he pleased about the gods. Although a number have tried many times since then, no one has been able as yet to free these gods from their fabled disguises; however, many of these gods are still in a state of mythological entanglement, and some of them will probably stay in that condition forever. In fact a man who thinks that he will ever bring to a most satisfactory conclusion the things that have been said about the gods by the ancients is like a man who hopes that he can bring all the ships that sail anywhere into port without losing a single one. The so-called ancient wise men did not always have a method in their madness, nor did the poets in these fabrications." Mulryan and Brown compare Bacon's *De sapientia* in one of the notes to the passage on pp. 1-2. Cf. also Vives in the fifth book of *De disciplinis*: "Since therefore history is *the witness of the ages and the light of truth* [Cicero in *De oratore*], its first corruption was the mingling of fictitious with true events, in the first place by the poets, who dealt only with what would give pleasure, since they merely aimed at the entertainment and amusement of their hearers; and since they did not believe that this could be achieved with the actual truth of things, they not only mingled falsehoods with true relations, but also produced new versions of the facts, which they thought would be more charming and impressive. They made use for this purpose of figures of speech, metaphors, allegories, amphibologies, similitudes of words and things: thus of a man whose name was *Taurus*, they said Taurus was a *bull*: a ship whose figurehead was a *ram*, they called, the *ram* [...]. The first writers were poets, they handed down these stories to the most ignorant men in the most elegant speech (for so it seemed to that age); they held the attention of the quick-witted and enchanted the slow; gradually the passing on and establishment of the error brought about a state of affairs in which the truth was so much obscured and buried under so many disguises, that even at that early date it could not be uncovered and brought into the light of day by their successors. Phurnutus, and many others, attempted to draw out the kernel of truth from the enveloping shell of poetry, but with no great success, and with a remarkable amount of disagreement among themselves" (Stein, "Study", 2: 39-40).

gods are really deified heroes and chieftains, and so on – but a profound and comprehensive knowledge possessed by ancients of the second age, which he locates between Moses and the Greeks;<sup>214</sup> finally, while typology is least essential to his purpose, he does turn to it, in one of the more conspicuous revisions in *De augmentis*, to affirm the Protestant credentials of his hermeneutics.<sup>215</sup>

<sup>214</sup> As he writes in the opening sentence of *The Wisdome of the Ancients*, “The Antiquities of the first age (except those we find in sacred Writ) were buried in obliuion and silence: silence was succeeded by Poeticall fables; and Fables againe were followed by the Records we now enioy. So that the mysteries and secrets of Antiquity were distinguished and separated from the Records and Euidences of succeeding times, by the vaile of fiction which interposed it selfe and came betweene those things which perished, and those which are extant” (a5v). Bacon’s rejection of rationalist mythography in its classic form is also noted by Lewis, “Allegory”, 376-7. Interesting in this relation is a passage from Bacon’s 1603 *Masculine Birth of Time*: “Finally you would wish to know what I think may be hidden behind the silence and the reserve of antiquity. My son, I shall answer you in my usual way, that is, in accordance with your best interests. I do acknowledge a broken light or two from antiquity (I speak of their discoveries, not of their books); and these broken lights I take rather as proofs of industry and native wit than of any developed science. But as for the writings which have vanished without a trace, I know your modesty well enough to be assured that you will not misunderstand me if I suggest that this hunting after guesses is a wearisome business and that it would not be a proper thing for me, who am preparing things useful for the future of the human race, to bury myself in the study of ancient literature”; trans. in B. Farrington, *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (Liverpool, 1964), 68. In spite of the fact that Plato has just been dismissed as “deluded”, his philosophy a “sham” (ibid., 64), this seems to be modelled on the passage in the *Phaedrus* where mythography, and specifically rationalist mythography, is similarly dismissed in favour of the infinitely more pressing cause of self-knowledge. After giving a brief rationalist account of the story of Boreas and Orithuia, Socrates says that “such explanations are amusing enough, but they are a job for a man I cannot envy at all. He’d have to be far too ingenious and work too hard – mainly because after that he will have to go on and give the rational account of the form of the Hippocentaurs, and then of the Chimera; and a whole flood of Gorgons and Pegasuses and other monsters, in large numbers and absurd form, will overwhelm him. Anyone who does not believe in them, who wants to explain them away and make them plausible by means of some sort of rough ingenuity, will need a great deal of time. But I have no time for such things; and the reason, my friend, is this. I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself; and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that” (*Works*, 509-19; 229b-230a).

<sup>215</sup> In the 1605 *Aduancement*, Bacon defines “ALLVSIVE or PARABOLICALL” poetry as “a NARRATION applied onely to expresse some speciall purpose or conceit” (Ee2v) – i.e., allegory, as the qualification “onely” clearly denotes, differing from typology precisely in treating the literal or historical meaning of the text as “onely” a vehicle for the meaning it supposedly transmits. Accordingly, rewriting this passage eighteen years later, Bacon finds it important to redefine “parabolical” poetry as “*History with the Type, which brings downe the Images of the understanding to the Objects of the Sense*” (*Advancement*, O1v; cf. *De augmentis*, P2v: “*Historia cum Typo, quæ Intellectualia deducit ad Sensum*”). Here it is also to be noted that while the term *allegory* and its cognates are employed throughout *De sapientia* – where, again, they refer not to any actual literary work surviving from the ancient or the modern world, but the ur-fables Bacon purports to reconstruct – they are wholly absent from the poetics section in the 1605 *Aduancement*, and are employed in only a single, decisively negative instance in *De augmentis* (not counting the three examples of mythographical exegesis, taken over from *De sapientia*). In the *Aduancement*, Bacon thus speaks affirmatively of “speciall purpose or conceit”, “Secrets and Misteries of Religion, Pollicy, or Philosophy, [...] inuolued in Fables or Parables”, and “figure”, neutrally of “inwardnesse”, and either neutrally or negatively of the “exposition” and the “Morall” (Ee2v-3v). In *De augmentis* some of these passages are kept and others discarded, and in addition we meet, affirmatively, with “*Fables, [...] Parables, [...] Ænigmas, and Similitudes*”, while “parabolical” poetry is described as that which “*tendeth to the folding up of those things; the dignity whereof, deserves to be retired, and distinguisht, as with a drawn Curtain*”; neutrally, with “*mysticall sense*”; and negatively, with “*Allegories*” (*Advancement*, O2r-v; cf. *De augmentis*, P3r-v: “*Allegorias*”; “*Fabularum, & Parabolaru[m], & Ænigmatum, & similitudinum*”; “*qui facit (vt diximus) ad Inuolucrum, earum nempè Rerum, quarum dignitas tanquam velo quodam discreta esse mereatur*”; “*Sensus mysticus*”). A positive use of *allegory* elsewhere in the *Aduancement*, where Homer’s golden chain is said to be an “*allegorie of the Poets*” (B3v), is removed in *De augmentis* (“*Poetarum Mythologiam*”;

While rejecting, then, allegoresis, mythographical rationalism, and varieties of *prisca sapientia* esotericism in their classic forms, Bacon retains selected features of these traditions, and combines them – sprinkled with the orthodox terminology of “parable” and “type” – into a hybrid approach to classical poetry uniquely tailored to free his poetics from the requirement of allegory. At the same time, however, he is able to retain the prestige of these venerable traditions for his broader project, and to integrate them, in this refurbished form, into the comprehensive conceptual structure of the Great Instauration. And there are also important practical benefits: since the presumed ur-fables do not exist in any form other than Bacon’s own reconstructions, the process of reconstruction, however independent in theory, in practice becomes indistinguishable from the process of interpretation – the mythographer gets to write his own myths, which, needless to say, considerably increases their hermeneutic pliancy.

Bacon’s peculiar view of “parabolical” poetry, certainly unprecedented in English poetics, and possibly even in a broader European context, is thus another in a series of compromises between tradition and innovation which comprise his poetic theory. While clearly pragmatic in practice, it should not be dismissed as such in its theoretical outline, which plays an essential role in his poetics, enabling him to maintain a theory of poetry substantially free of allegory even while indulging in large-scale mythological allegoresis, since the subject of his interpretations are not any extant works of ancient poetry but the reconstructed ur-fables. He does not, like the great majority of allegorists before him, find allegorical meaning in Homer and Hesiod, or Virgil and Ovid. Indeed he washes his hands of

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B4v). The unusual choice of the term “parabolical” is telling, and appears to be due to the fact that Christ’s parables, known universally under that term, were the one form of “allegorical” discourse to which no denominational objections could be made. Further of interest here is that Bacon removes the other designation, “allusive”, from *De augmentis*, where we hear exclusively of “*Poesis Parabolica*”, probably because the words *allusio* and *allusion* had, among others, a special hermeneutic sense denoting a type of biblical interpretation often indistinguishable from allegoresis; see *OED*, *allusion*, 2, “A symbolic reference or likening; a metaphor, a parable, an allegory”, and H. Hamlin’s discussion in *The Bible in Shakespeare* (Oxford, 2013), 85-95. These terminological adjustments are also consistent with the Protestant anti-allegorism further discussed in ch. 3. While not strictly necessary to Bacon’s mythography, in its ability to ward off the central objection to biblical allegoresis – that it distorts the meanings of the biblical text according to the preconceived agendas of the interpreter – while at the same time offering an alternative means for its ideological maintenance, typology can be seen as functionally analogous to Bacon’s approach to ancient myth. Just like typology enabled Protestant interpreters to derive secondary meanings from the Bible without, in theory, departing from its literal sense, so Bacon’s mythography enables him to derive secondary meanings from ancient myths without, in theory, violating the imaginative integrity of the works which unwittingly preserve them.

this whole tradition, and remains sceptical even about the authenticity of his own interpretations.<sup>216</sup>

Furthermore, Bacon's theory of "parabolical" poetry also forestalls, or at least extenuates, the obvious objection that in unearthing natural, political and moral philosophy in ancient myth he contradicts his own categorical distinction between philosophy/reason and poetry/imagination. The esoteric use of "parabolical" poesy is indeed explicitly defined as that in which "*the secrets and mysteries of Religion, Policy, and Philosophy are veiled, and invested with Fables, and Parables*", and he speaks similarly of "Philosophy according to *ancient Parables*".<sup>217</sup> Has Bacon forgotten that he has separated poetry from philosophy? Theoretically, the allegorical content of the esoteric kind of "parabolical" poetry must fall under the domains of theology and philosophy rather than poetry. If Bacon was able to claim that rhetoric played a part in poetry, yet properly belonged to philosophy, what prevented him from claiming the same about the philosophical content of "parabolical" poetry? Did he simply take this for granted? Here again it is to be kept in mind that the fables that he professes to interpret – and they are always "fables", never "poesy" – are emphatically not the

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<sup>216</sup> In the *Wisdom* he criticizes at length the "liberty [...] lately much abused" by those who "wrest many poetically Fables" and "purchase the reverence of Antiquitie to their owne inventions and fancies", who are "able to apply things well, yet so as neuer meant by the first Authors", whose "writings, though voluminous and full of paines, [...] haue applied the sense of these Parables to certaine vulgar and generall things, not so much as glancing at their true vertue, genuine proprietie, and full depth" (*Wisdom*, a6r, A11v-12r). He takes the opportunity to extend this censure to the alchemists, who also "appropriate the fancies and delights of Poets in the transformations of bodies, to the experiments of their furnace". In *De augmentis*, his final statement on the subject, mythography is still "contaminate by the levity and indulgence of mens wits about *Allegories*", and "imbased" by "Schooleboyes", "Grammarians", and "unskilfull men, not learned beyond common places" (*Advancement*, O2r-v). In spite of the uncounted host of allegorists from the ancient Greeks down to his own contemporaries, whose efforts "give us no satisfaction at all", mythological allegoresis is placed on the list of insufficiently developed fields of knowledge, requiring further investigation (ibid., O2v). As for his own views, in the already cited passage from the *Advancement* he says that "many" of the allegorical interpretations are false, but that all are false he "will interpose no opinion". In the *Wisdom* he is ready to affirm that "some", but not all, of the fables contain genuine, intentional allegorical meanings, yet his arguments are again markedly ambiguous. He feels that in some fables the correspondence between the literal and allegorical meanings is too perfect to be unintentional, and he also feels that the patent absurdity of some of the fables in itself points to "other ends" – but it could also be that he is simply "ravished with the reverence of Antiquity" (*Wisdom*, a7r-9r). As for any who would still "obstinately contend, that Allegories are alwaies aduentitally, & as it were by constraint, neuer naturally and properly included in Fables, we will not be much troublesome, but suffer them to enioy that grauity of iudgment which I am sure they affect, although indeed it be but lumpish and almost leaden" (a10r). The Preface ends on a particularly ambiguous and even impish note: "Wherefore all that hath beene said, wee will thus conclude: The Wisdome of the Ancients, it was either much or happy; Much if these figures and tropes were inuented by studie and premeditation. Happy if they (intending nothing lesse) gaue matter and occasion to so many worthy Meditations. As concerning my labours (if there bee any thing in them which may do good) I will on neither part count them ill bestowed, my purpose being to illustrate either Antiquity, or things themselves" (a11r-v).

<sup>217</sup> *Advancement*, O2v.



surviving ancient poems, much less modern ones, enabling him to say that Homer intended no allegorical meanings in his poems, even as he derives such meanings from these very poems. Consequently, if we follow this line of thinking to its logical conclusion, there is no contradiction, as it is not poetry but the myths *behind* the poetry – a separate category of discourse, belonging to a specific and irretrievable historical context – which harbour philosophical content, and should thus be classified under philosophy.

But then why include them in the discussion of poetry in the first place? It thus remains a legitimate question whether, and to what extent, the case of esoteric “parabolic” poesy violates the distinction between poetry and philosophy. It is no good preserving the absolute coherence of Bacon’s poetics at all costs. On the contrary, a degree of inconsistency is precisely what one would expect from such a transitional document, and is to be foregrounded rather than suppressed, for the vaguer and more contradictory Bacon’s statements get, the more are they symptomatic of the novelty of his poetic thought – and the vaguest of all is also the key one, stating his view of the purpose of poetry. “For seeing”, he writes, “this sensible world, is in dignity inferior to the soule of Man; *Poesy* seems to endow Humane Nature with that which *History* denies; and to give satisfaction to the Mind, with, at least, the shadow of things, where the substance cannot be had”.<sup>218</sup> This repeats the better known and substantially identical formulation in the 1605 *Advancement*, where poesy is said, in Bacon’s own English, “to giue some shadowe of satisfaction to the minde of Man in those points, wherein the Nature of things doth denie it, the world being in proportion inferiour to the soule”.<sup>219</sup> This is really the central statement of Bacon’s theory of poetry, aligning it to the fundamental cause of his whole project, which is the amelioration of man’s earthly existence. In the same way in which the spiritual aspect of man’s condition can be improved by the correct form of religion, and its intellectual, political, and material aspects by advancements in science and technology, so can its emotional and more broadly spiritual aspect be improved by fiction.

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<sup>218</sup> *Advancement*, O1v.

<sup>219</sup> *Advancement*, Ee1v.

Prior to Bacon, the delight occasioned by fiction is justified only as a means to an end – the sugar coating of the bitter pill, the tender fruit enveloping the hard kernel, the life-giving cure extracted from a deadly poison – not as an end in itself. The insubstantial shadows of poetic fiction could not, in themselves, satisfy the mind of Sidney or anyone else who agreed that “the end of all earthly learning [is] virtuous action”.<sup>220</sup> Bacon does not disallow that poetry, on the whole, “conduces” this end, among others, but delightful teaching does not constitute the essence of poetry and the poetic experience as he sees it. In fact, Bacon employs such terms as “teaching” or “instruction” only with reference to the genres of the drama and “parabolical” poetry in its exoteric aspect, a category comprising such patently didactic texts as the Aesopic fables or the collection of sayings or “symbols” attributed to Pythagoras. Plays “should instruct the minds of men unto virtue” – by which, moreover, Bacon has in mind the mass-psychological effect of theatrical performance in front of a large audience rather than drama as a literary genre – while exoteric “parabolic” poetry is a “way of teaching which conduceth to *Illustration*”.<sup>221</sup> These, however, are recognizably the lower poetic genres, addressing the grammar school pupil, tackling one of the earliest properly literary texts on the curriculum, and the multitude assembled in the playhouse. With respect to “poesy” in general, however, clearly modelled on the privileged genre of the epic, it is fiction which is seen as its essential property, and there is something good and valuable in the enjoyment of fiction, in itself, apart from any didactic function it might serve, and without an imperative to harness it, especially in its farthest reaches, through allegoresis. It is alright for a man – a serious, moral, and learned man, not merely the much-derided exponent of the proverbial common mob – to indulge in the insubstantial shadows of fiction. Bacon insists on this even though he recognizes, at least with regard to the popular drama, the danger of misusing the power of poetic imagination. No English critic before him, nor for a considerable time after, had allowed as much. This is a level of respect for the human condition, and specifically the

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<sup>220</sup> Sidney, *Defence*, 83.

<sup>221</sup> “[W]ise men and great Philosophers, have accounted it [i.e., the stage], as the Archet, or musicall Bow of the Mind. And certainly it is most true, and as it were, a secret of nature, *that the minds of men are more patent to affections, and impre[ss]ions, Congregate, than solitary*” (*Advancement*, O2r).

human faculty of the imagination, that the overwhelming majority of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetical thought is simply unable to acknowledge.

In this, however, as in so much else, Bacon is virtually alone in the early seventeenth century. Contemporary English critics whose work betrays a reading of his writings on poetry and myth are clearly lacking in the appreciation of the deeper and subtler points of his arguments.<sup>222</sup> It should be clear what this portends for the neo-Burckhardtian narratives of critical and aesthetic modernity which continue to dominate much of the study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English poetics. It is less clear, however, and much more important, what we are to make of the curious and isolated case of Francis Bacon, and the fact that of all the period's statements of poetic theory, the one that comes closest to the ideals of modern aesthetics is by a man whose intellectual profile is so radically divergent, not only from that of the typical sixteenth and early seventeenth-century literary theorist, but from the period's most characteristic intellectual tendencies in general. What can we learn from the example of

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<sup>222</sup> In his *Mythomystes*, Reynolds takes Bacon to task for doubting the validity of mythological allegoresis, yet Reynolds' own exegesis of the fable of Narcissus shows how little he had adopted of Bacon's complex and innovative position. Reynolds' is the earliest statement positing an inconsistency in Bacon's work on poetics and myth: "suppose that a man (nor vnlearned one neither) shall haue taken paines in foure or fiue fables of the Auncients to vnfold and deliuer vs much doctrine and high meanings in them, which he calls their wisdom; and yet this same man in another Treatise of his, shall say of those auncient Fables. – *I think they were first made, and their expositions deuised afterward*: and a little after – *Of Homer himself, notwithstanding he was made a kind of Scripture by the latter Scooles of the Græcians, yet I should without any difficulty pronounce his fables had in his owne meaning no such inwardnesse, &c.* What shall we make of such willing contradiction[n]s, when a man to vent a few fancies of his owne, shall tell vs first, they are the wisdom of the Auncients; and next, that those Auncient fables were but meere fables, and without wisdom or meaning, til their expositours gaue them a meaning" (*Mythomystes*, L3v-4r). Reynolds does state, apparently in response to Bacon, that he is expounding what "the Fable was by the first deuizers therof made to meane", but he makes no attempt at a reconstruction of an ur-fable from his immediate source, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (P1v). It is clear what Bacon would have made of this source, of Reynolds' authorities, and of his eclectic method, unearthing in the single fable "Geographick" (i.e. rationalist), "Physick", "Morall", and "Diuine" senses. Reynolds also plainly attempts to follow Bacon in dismissing from his discussion of poetry the mere "vnder-Accidents" of verse and figurative language, but instead of finding "the Forme and reall Essence of true Poësy" in fiction and imagination, he repeats, in extreme form, the view which finds poetry's essence in its allegorical mediation of arcane philosophical knowledge (A3r-4r). To take another example, Hobbes, in 1650, likely follows Bacon in defining poesy as narrative fiction, and consequently in not viewing "Sonnetts, Epigrammes, Eclogues, and the like pieces" as poetry, but rather as the "Essayes, and parts of an entire Poeme" (*Answer*, F4v). But the similarity goes only so far: Hobbes also believes that verse is essential, that poetry must not overstep the bounds of verisimilitude, that "That which giveth a Poem the true and naturall Colour, consisteth in two things, which are, *To know well*, [...] and *To know much*", that poems "delight all sorts of men, either by instructing the ignorant, or soothing the learned in their knowledge", and so forth (ibid., F12v). Indeed, a quarter of a century later, in the preface to his 1675 translation of the *Odyssey*, even the requirement of verisimilar fiction has dropped, and Hobbes now requires in a poet "Justice and Impartiality", which "belongeth as well to History as to Poetry. For both the Poet and the Historian writeth only (or should do) matter of Fact"; *Homer's Odysseys* (London, 1675), B4r. The statement is particularly remarkable for appearing in a preface to the *Odyssey* of all poems. No wonder Hobbes fails to explain how this precept is supposed to apply to the poem he decided to translate, or indeed why he decided to do so: "Why then did I write it? Because I had nothing else to do" (ibid., B9v).

a man whose adult life spans the very height of the English “Renaissance” – the period we are urged to understand as one of immense achievements in virtually all aspects of human endeavour – yet who saw himself as lighting a “new torch in the dark days of philosophy”, who spoke so poignantly “of the solitude in which this experiment moves, and how hard, how unbelievably difficult, it is to get people to believe in it”, and who rushed fragments and sketches of his work to print mortified by the uncertain prospect of “when such things would occur to anyone again in the future”, so that “if in the human way of things, anything should happen to him, there would still be extant an outline and plan of the thing which he had conceived in his mind”, and “some indication of his genuine concern for the good of the human race”?<sup>223</sup>

These are questions that the history of poetics and literary criticism is yet to meaningfully tackle, and which, if unravelled to their utmost implications, can only result in a thorough rewriting of this history. In the fourth century BC, the first “father of science” decreed that correctness in poetry is not the same as correctness in politics, or in any other art, but by all accounts he too was an isolated voice, and this aspect of his work soon fell into oblivion and misinterpretation. Now, two millennia later, another “father of science” arrives at a comparable position – and arrives at it, in part, by browsing through the *Poetics*, in the methodical, schematized translation by Goulston, a physician – yet the outcome is exactly the same. At least until Romanticism, glimmerings of poetic and aesthetic modernity, as we perhaps still understand it today, remain an anomaly, appearing and disappearing across the centuries with such atypical, proto-scientific figures as Aristotle and Bacon. Throughout this period, the conflation of poetry with philosophy and rhetoric, including the allegorical tradition as its most radical manifestation – or the inverse position, banishing allegory at the cost of severely curtailing the scope of permissible poetic subject matter – reigns supreme.

Neither this precarious flicker, nor the monolithic continuity against which we detect it, can be meaningfully aligned to the established conceptual and periodisational frameworks, and certainly the idea of the so-called “Renaissance” as a transformative period in this respect

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<sup>223</sup> *New Organon*, 3-4.

must be abandoned, at least as far the English corpus is concerned. In its most characteristic productions, the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century saw no advances in the fundamentals of poetic theory – the *fundamentals*, let us emphasize for the one final time, of poetic *theory* – over the preceding period. Conversely, where such an advance does appear, it emerges from an intellectual profile radically at odds with the dominant currents of the age. In neighbouring disciplines covering some of the same terrain this is not a controversial claim. For example, a philosophy of art primer can routinely quote Bacon in support of the claim that “Historically a shift away from representation theories of art to pleasure- and experience-oriented theories was specifically motivated by a growing sense of the claims of the modern mathematical-experimental sciences of nature to have a central title to accuracy of representation and instruction, apparently leaving no room for art in fulfilling these functions”.<sup>224</sup> Even here, however, the emphasis is negative: science *banishes* art from its newly conquered provinces. Yet for Bacon, as I have tried to show – and, in principle, for anyone adopting a similar position – precisely the opposite is true: rather than banishing it, the autonomy of science liberates art, just as the autonomy of art liberates science. The ancient quarrel resolved, Poesy and Philosophy peacefully coexist, each in its proper place at the very top of Bacon’s tree of knowledge. At least as far as literary history is concerned, however, this thesis – that modern science and modern aesthetics emerge jointly, as mutually defining and enabling categories, out of the unprecedented intellectual ferment of the seventeenth century, and that allegorical poetics, as the most radical manifestation of the old paradigm, inevitably falls victim to this process – is yet to be given a proper hearing.

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<sup>224</sup> R. Eldrige, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2014), 54.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**ALLEGORY AND DRAMA**

Why did the Italians of the Renaissance do nothing above the second rank in tragedy? That was the field on which to display human character, intellect, and passion, in the thousand forms of their growth, their struggles, and their decline. In other words: why did Italy produce no Shakespeare?

– J. Burckhardt, 1860

At first sight, the trajectory of the English drama in the course of the sixteenth century – from religious to secular subjects, and from an allegorical to a non-allegorical mode of representation – would seem to offer the ideal illustration of the Burckhardtian model. In fact, right at the heart of the *Civilization*, in one of the book's key chapters, "The Discovery of Man", one stumbles across the above-quoted passage, in which Burckhardt himself implicitly affirms this view.<sup>1</sup> Nothing in the preceding discussion quite prepares the reader for these lines, which are fundamentally incompatible with the book's central thesis. How is it, indeed, that the model premised on the innately pagan *Volksgeist* of the Italians – for "We must insist upon it, as one of the chief propositions of this book, that it was not the revival of antiquity alone, but its union with the genius of the Italian people, which achieved the conquest of the Western world"<sup>2</sup> – comes to realization in the prized sphere of the drama, and specifically tragedy, at the far end of the continent, in provincial, Protestant England?

Ironically, the increasing evidence of the extent of Shakespeare's debt to "medieval" literary and intellectual traditions – on which my analysis of *Hamlet* in the latter portion of this chapter builds, and to which it seeks to contribute – suggests an answer that runs exactly counter to Burckhardt's intuitions. Other things being equal, notably the crucial yet elusive factor of individual temperament and talent, it seems very plausible to say that "Whenever you have a gap between what Classical writers were doing and what Renaissance writers do, it is almost always because of what happened in between".<sup>3</sup> And if so, then it is further

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<sup>1</sup> *Civilization*, 204.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>3</sup> H. Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2006), 11. For a bibliography of the work on the subject between 1900 and 1980, see J. P. McRoberts, *Shakespeare and Medieval Tradition* (New York, 1985). McRoberts' bibliography, which claims to be "comprehensive" (x) in its coverage, offers a graphic illustration of the marginalization of this topic in Shakespeare studies: a miserable, by Shakespearean standards, 933 publications are listed for the entire eighty-year period, of which, moreover, many are concerned with the subject

plausible to suggest that Shakespeare emerged in England precisely because there was *less* “Renaissance” there than in Italy, and that the absence of his Italian counterpart, far from being problematic, is in fact precisely what one would expect to find. However, to a nineteenth-century historian who saw Shakespeare as the supreme reflection of Renaissance culture, and at the same time saw the origin of this culture in the revival of classical antiquity as qualified by the Italian national spirit, this absence was seriously problematic. The “people which possessed the power, perhaps to a greater degree than any other, to reflect and contemplate its own highest qualities in the mirror of the drama” simply ought to have produced a brilliant and lastingly relevant playwright.<sup>4</sup> Again the unruly domain of literature threatens to collapse the whole culture-historical edifice, and again the forestalling of this collapse requires – this time quite literally – a *deus ex machina*. “It is an obvious reply”, writes Burckhardt, “that all Europe produced but one Shakespeare, and that such a mind is the rarest of Heaven’s gifts”.<sup>5</sup> Of course nothing could be less obvious under the terms of a *Volksgeist* theory of culture, and in fact, while England is thus deprived of any defining role in the creation of Shakespeare, the product of no one nation but all of Europe, the Italian failure to produce an equivalent playwright is still blamed on corrupting foreign influence: Italy may have been on its way to a Shakespeare when “the Counter-Reformation broke in upon it, and, aided by the Spanish rule over Naples and Milan, and indirectly over almost the whole peninsula, withered the best flowers of the Italian spirit”.

The importance of the passage cannot be overemphasized. It represents the first application of this particular period-concept to these particular spheres of culture: prior to Burckhardt’s passage, there was simply no such thing as “Renaissance drama”, nor had the notion of the Renaissance as a comprehensive period in cultural history yet been applied to England, nor had anyone referred to Shakespeare as a Renaissance playwright. However self-

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only partially, or even incidentally. More recently, however, there has been a most welcome and long overdue change of tide: besides Cooper’s lecture, see *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, ed. J. Perry and C. Watkins (Oxford, 2009); *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, ed. M. W. Driver and S. Ray (Jefferson, 2009); H. Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World* (London, 2010); “Premodern Shakespeare”, special issue of *JMEMS* 30 (2010), ed. S. Beckwith and J. Simpson; “Medieval Shakespeare”, special issue of *Shakespeare* 8 (2012), ed. C. Wald; *Medieval Shakespeare*, ed. R. Morse, H. Cooper, and P. Holland (Cambridge, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Burckhardt, *Civilization*, 208-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.



evident all this may seem today, it was virtually nonexistent before these lines were written. It is therefore important to emphasize just how radically Burckhardt transforms the received view of the subject, and furthermore, to point out that the major influence governing this transformation actually ran in a direction opposite than expected. By his own admission, Burckhardt cannot have derived his view of tragedy as the supreme expression of Renaissance individualism from the “second rate” efforts of the Italians. In effect, rather than making Shakespeare Renaissance, Burckhardt makes the Renaissance Shakespearean.

The manoeuvre is all the more remarkable considering that the Romantic view of Shakespeare, which Burckhardt shared with most readers of his age, and which is obviously operative in this passage, had up to this point been premised on the very antithesis of everything Burckhardt’s Renaissance stands for.<sup>6</sup> When it did not outright dismiss him, or adapt him to suit contemporary tastes, the classicist sensibility of the later seventeenth and eighteenth century could extend only a limited amount of appreciation to Shakespeare, as a master of a dead rather than a living art. Thus Pope, for whom the Middle Ages were a “second deluge” in which “the monks finished what the Goths begun”, famously likened Shakespeare to “an ancient majestick piece of *Gothick Architecture*”: even though it may “strike us with greater reverence” than the “neat Modern building” of regular classicist drama, it is still the latter that we should adopt as our model.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, the Romantic critics turned the tables on such judgments: Shakespeare is indeed Gothic, and precisely because he is Gothic he is revealed to be precociously modern, whereas classicism has become obsolete. Now, however, in the space of three pages of Burckhardt’s book, the tables turn again, into a configuration which would have been as unacceptable to Pope as it would have been to Coleridge. Shakespeare remains modern, and the substance of this modernity remains the same as with the Romantic critics who originally championed it – the unprecedented insight

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<sup>6</sup> Brown misses this more fundamental point when he notes that Burckhardt’s question is “indicative of nineteenth-century Romantic views of Italian Renaissance drama and Shakespeare himself”, and that “Burckhardt and other late Romantic critics looked at Italian drama through Shakespeare-tinted spectacles”; R. D. Brown, “The London Stage”, in *Courts, Patrons, and Poets*, ed. D. Mateer (London, 2000), 300. Until these lines were written, “Renaissance drama”, Italian or otherwise, simply did not exist. It is in this very passage that such a thing comes into being, and it comes into being through Burckhardt’s application of the Romantic ideal of Shakespearean tragedy onto the Italian materials, which had not been previously considered in such a light.

<sup>7</sup> *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. A. Pope (London, 1725), 1: xxiii-xxiv.

into human nature and a godlike capability for creating individualized, inimitably life-like, psychologically complex characters – yet their explanation of this modernity is completely evacuated and replaced by its exact antithesis.

This Renaissance rebranding of Shakespeare, and more importantly, this Shakespearean rebranding of the Renaissance, soon came to influence scholarship on the English drama. For illustration we can again turn to Symonds, as Burckhardt's passage is not only a direct precedent for Symonds' rebranding of the Elizabethan Age as the English Renaissance, but also, significantly, for his return to an abandoned history of pre-Shakespearean drama.<sup>8</sup> Prior work on the history of English drama had already established the key coordinates of secularization and deallegorisation, but these did not coincide with the medieval-Renaissance divide in either conceptual or chronological terms. Dodsley, Percy, Warton, Malone, Collier: one after another, they all tell versions of the same story of how the drama found its way from "allegorical" to "real historical personages" – a story paralleled, it may be noted, both conceptually and chronologically, by related editorial developments, namely regularized speech prefixes and *dramatis personae* lists, and the advent of "character criticism".<sup>9</sup> The reason for this transformation, however, is either deemed inexplicable in

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<sup>8</sup> See J. A. Symonds, *Shakspeare's Predecessors in the English Drama* (London, 1884). According to the Preface (vii), Symonds began this work in 1862 but abandoned it unfinished in 1865, "discouraged partly by ill-health, partly by a conviction that the subject was beyond the scope and judgment of a literary beginner". I would suggest, however, that the conceptual backbone provided by Burckhardt's work, and in particular the suggestive "Italian Shakespeare" passage in the *Civilization*, with which Symonds was almost certainly unfamiliar in 1865, was a more decisive factor.

<sup>9</sup> In 1741, Dodsley published L. Riccoboni's *Historical and Critical Account of the Theatres in Europe* (London, 1741), which related the development of the secular out of the religious drama in the major European literatures. Dodsley augmented this account in the Preface to his *Old Plays* (London, 1744) by drawing a firm distinction between mystery and morality plays, and dividing the development of English drama into four stages: the mysteries ("This Period one might call the dead Sleep of the Muses"), the moralities ("a kind of Morning Dream"), the rise of the new drama marked by humanist influence ("The Muse might now be said to be just awake"), and finally the sudden, unprecedented arrival – "as it were, all at once" – of the "true Drama", which "received Birth and Perfection from the creative Genius of *Shakespear, Fletcher and Johnson*" (1: xiii-xxi). An evolutionary dimension is added to the account in Percy's *Reliques* (London, 1765): the moralities did not simply succeed the mysteries but developed, "by degrees", out of the allegorical elements contained in them; in turn, the three kinds or aspects of the morality play developed into tragedy, comedy, and tragicomedy, while the masque is nothing else than the continuation of the morality play "with some classical improvements" (1: 120-6); finally, the mystery cycles mutated into the history plays, for which *The Mirror for Magistrates* "probably furnished the subject, and the antient Mysteries suggested the plan", the two being similar in "representing a series of historical events simply in the order of time in which they happened, without any regard to the three great unities" (1:126-7) – a brilliant flash of structuralist intuition, which Shakespeareans would return to explore only centuries later. Percy's account is then taken over in Warton's *History* (at times almost verbatim, e.g., 1: 242), which is in turn quoted at length in *The Plays and Poems of William Shakspeare*, ed. E. Malone (London, 1790), 2: 3. See also J. P. Collier, *The History of English Dramatic Poetry* (London, 1831): the mystery play (or

literary-historical terms, an outburst of unprecedented and ineffable “genius”, or is attributed to categories which, as we have already seen, presume no sharp distinction between the “medieval” and the “Renaissance”, at least with respect to this particular sphere of culture.

For Symonds, however, the distinction does apply and the explanation is only too obvious: the Elizabethan drama is the very “embodi[ment]”, “mirror”, and “compendium of all that the Renaissance had brought to light”.<sup>10</sup> Indeed it is even more than that: for the English, the drama is not merely the supreme expression of the Renaissance – it literally *is* the Renaissance. Verging on mysticism, Symonds explains how the Elizabethan drama

meant for England the recovery of Greek and Latin culture, the emancipation of the mind from medieval bondage, the emergence of the human spirit in its freedom. It meant newly discovered heavens, a larger earth, sail-swept oceans, awakened continents beyond Atlantic seas. It meant the pulse of now ascendant and puissant heart-blood through a people conscious of their unity and strength, the puberty and adolescence of a race which in its manhood was destined to give social freedom to the world.

All this proceeds directly from Burckhardt’s “Italian Shakespeare” passage, and is indeed nothing but the repetition of Burckhardt’s argument in inverse form: what was to be lamented in the case of Italy, which had everything except the drama, can now be turned to advantage in the case of England, which had nothing but the drama, yet such drama as “conveyed to

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“miracle play”, as Collier prefers) is transformed, “almost imperceptibly”, into the morality play, “by the gradual intermixture of allegory with sacred history”, and the morality play in turn gives way “to Tragedy and Comedy, by the introduction, from time to time, of characters in actual life, or supposed to be drawn from it” (1: ix-x). Importantly, however, while this drama “reached maturity at the hands of Shakespeare”, his achievement should not be exaggerated: “It was, in truth, created by no one man, and in no one age; and whatever improvements Shakespeare introduced, it will be seen that when he began to write for the theatre, our romantic drama was completely formed and firmly established” (ibid., 1: x). As with other aspects of Shakespearean editing, there is a sizeable literature on the introduction of the *dramatis personae* lists – first systematically executed in Rowe’s edition, *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear*, ed. N. Rowe (London, 1709) – and the regularization of speech prefixes; for a succinct discussion, see M. de Grazia and P. Stallybrass, “The Materiality of Shakespeare’s Text”, *SQ* 44 (1993): 255-83, pp. 267-9. On the prefixes, see esp. *Shakespeare’s Speech-Headings*, ed. G. W. Williams (Cranbury, 1997). On Shakespearean “character criticism”, see B. Vickers, “The Emergence of Character Criticism”, *SS* 34 (1982): 11-22.

<sup>10</sup> *Predecessors*, 13.

English minds what Italy, great mother of renescent Europe, had with all her arts, with all her industries and sciences, made manifest”.<sup>11</sup>

With Symonds, then, the familiar account of the transition from allegories to “real personage[s], who would have been at home in ordinary English households”, assumes a definite periodisational shape.<sup>12</sup> In a particularly explicit statement, he notes how

Three centuries of militant and triumphant humanism, of developed art, and of advancing science have rendered allegory irksome to the modern mind. We recognise its essential imperfection, and are hardly able to do justice to such merits as it undoubtedly possessed for people not yet accustomed to distinguish thought from figured models of presentation. It is our duty, if we care to understand the last phase of medieval culture, to throw ourselves back into the mental condition of men who demanded that abstractions should be clothed for them by art in visible shapes – [...] men who delighted in the ingenuity and grotesquery of what to us is little better than a system of illustrated conundrums; [...] men who naturally thought their deepest thoughts out into tangibilities by means of allegorical mythology.<sup>13</sup>

Modern English drama is born at the moment at which this condition dissolves, the moment – Symonds locates it in Nicholas Udall’s *Ralph Roister Doister*, printed in 1567 – at which English playwrights “emerge[d] from medieval grotesquery and allegory into the clear light of actual life, into an agreeable atmosphere of urbanity and natural delineation”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 203-4.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 203. Cf. A. W. Ward’s *History* (London, 1875), acknowledged by Symonds as the chief contemporary authority on the subject (*Predecessors*, viii). The underlying narrative remains that of a passage from “allegorical abstractions” to “real human personages”, but the novelty is that this passage is now partly ascribed to the “Renaissance”, a concept which Ward inherits primarily from Arnold, although he was also familiar with Burckhardt (*History*, 1: 78-9, n. 2). As used by Ward, however, the term does not denote a comprehensive historical epoch, and is most frequently referred to as an intellectual and artistic “movement” (xxiv *et passim*), in tandem with the “movement” of the Reformation, or a “period” in literary but not general cultural history (26, cf. 271). Chronologically, its lower limit is “the close of the so-called Middle Ages” (xxiv), but its upper limit does not extend to the golden age of Elizabethan drama: “the Renaissance movement [...] reaches its height in the earlier part of the reign of Elisabeth” (154). For all its positive impulses (66, 68, 91-2), the Renaissance remained a foreign import cultivated by the social elite centred on the court, and lacking genuine popular support it was prone to degenerating into sterile pedantry. Significantly, this includes its continuing participation in “the ancient and enduring national predilection” for allegory; Chaucer alone had escaped it, but he had no followers, and at the high point of the Renaissance we still find the “cold and tame” allegories of Sidney and Spenser (56-7, 156). The drama is no exception: not only do the “tedious” morality plays survive

It is, and remains, a powerful narrative, told by powerful narrators, and it continues to inform much of the representative literature on the subject. It transcends superficial disciplinary divides, uniting, for example, such an obvious suspect as Harold Bloom – whose sweeping thesis of Shakespeare’s “invention of the human” does not omit an appreciative reference to Burckhardt’s musings on the Italian Shakespeare<sup>15</sup> – with an arguably less obvious figure like Stephen Greenblatt, whose unwavering allegiance to the Swiss master governs the whole of his influential opus, from the first page of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* to the syllogism latent in the alternative subtitles of *The Swerve*.<sup>16</sup> It is particularly explicit, as far the drama is concerned, in his two Shakespearean publications directed at a wider reading public. Thus we read, in Greenblatt’s best-selling *Will in the World*, how Shakespeare triumphs over the morality playwrights by realizing that “the spectacle of human destiny was [...] vastly more compelling when it attached itself not to generalized abstractions but to particular named

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throughout the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century, but the same impulse finds its authentic Renaissance expression in the work of Lyly – a “deplorable [...] aberration from the true principles of poetic creation”, contributing “nothing to the legitimate drama” of the later Elizabethan period (78, 134, 263). A further innovation is the distinction between three rather than two stages in the de-allegorization process – from allegories to types, and from types to individuals (140, 260) – which loosely correspond to the three periods in the drama’s history, namely the Middle Ages, the transitional period of the Renaissance, and finally, after about 1590, the mature drama of the later Elizabethan and Jacobean period. At most, pre-1590 playwrights made the transition from allegories to types, but even this was not an exclusively Renaissance achievement, and had been “asserting itself in individual instances” already in medieval drama (91). On the whole, the Renaissance “contributed to prepare and fertilise the soil into which was to descend the seed of genius, the gift of Heaven” (xxxii), but this contribution was not remotely sufficient for, and was in many respects an impediment to, the additional “great step” (140) from types to individuals, which Shakespeare was to make (510-11). However, although Ward’s description of Shakespeare as “the gift of Heaven” is a direct translation of Burckhardt’s “Geschenk des Himmels” (*Kultur*, 274) – and although Ward is happy to repeat after him that “a genius such as Shakspeare’s [...] belongs to no age and to no country exclusively” (271), he does have a historical explanation for “the outward conditions” (246) that made its expression possible, and these are both specifically national and anti-Renaissance. Other things being equal, we owe Shakespeare to the emergence of a stable, financially self-sustainable, and genuinely popular stage, governed not by aristocratic patronage but by “the verdict of popular applause” (247), and this stage, endemic to England, we owe to specifically national developments in what Ward refers to as “the great national age of the latter half of Elisabeth’s reign” (481).

<sup>15</sup> H. Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York, 1998), 719.

<sup>16</sup> See S. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980; repr. Chicago, 2005), 1, on the “central [...] perception – as old in academic writing as Burckhardt and Michelet – that there is in the early modern period a change in the intellectual, social, psychological, and aesthetic structures that govern the generation of identities”. The UK and US editions of *The Swerve* are subtitled *How the Renaissance Began* (London, 2011), and *How the World Became Modern* (New York, 2011).

people, people realized with an unprecedented intensity of individuation: not Youth but Prince Hal, not Everyman but Othello”.<sup>17</sup>

Even if we allow for a concession to the wide readership such a book seeks to address, it is still striking to see a major contemporary critic, and a historicist no less, refer so emphatically to literary characters as *people*. Might it be more than an inconsequential metaphorical flourish – might this slip of the stirring Burckhardtian unconscious be a sign of changing times? Until very recently, a rare and seemingly irreversible consensus among the various schools of modern literary criticism had mandated that, whatever else they might be, literary characters are not people, and that there is no way of knowing, hence no point in asking, how many children Lady Macbeth had, or what her own girlhood was like. Back in 1998, even Bloom, in a book which presented a deliberate affront to this consensus, stops short of such a definite statement.<sup>18</sup> And yet, however inconceivable it may have seemed at the time, it now looks as if Bloom will have the last laugh, for more recently cognate discourse has proliferated. “Character has made a comeback”, we are informed by the editors of a 2009 volume, making a stand for “the development in Shakespeare studies of what might best be termed a ‘new character criticism’”.<sup>19</sup> Perversely conservative in its day, Bloom’s introductory chapter on “Shakespeare’s Universalism” begins to seem curiously avant-garde in the wake of recent books on *Shakespeare’s Humanism*, *Shakespeare’s Freedom*, *Shakespeare’s Individualism*, and, coming full circle, *Shakespeare’s Universality* – books which, disregarding superficial differences in emphasis, restate the same basic argument, on the same basic grounds.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> S. Greenblatt, *Will in the World* (2004; repr. New York, 2005), 34. Greenblatt does acknowledge a degree of debt, “for the most part [...] indirect and subtle”, owed by Shakespeare to the morality tradition, which “helped fashion the foundations, largely hidden well below the surface, of his writing” (33).

<sup>18</sup> Albeit reluctantly: “No world author rivals Shakespeare in the apparent creation of personality, and I employ ‘apparent’ here with some reluctance”; “I never know how to take the assurances (and remonstrances) I receive from Shakespeare’s current critics, who tell me that Falstaff, Hamlet, Rosalind, Cleopatra, and Iago are roles for actors and actresses but not ‘real people’” (*Invention*, xviii, 14-15).

<sup>19</sup> *Shakespeare and Character*, ed. P. Yachnin and J. Slight (Basingstoke, 2009), 1. See also *Shakespeare’s Sense of Character*, ed. Y. J. Ko and M. W. Shurgot (Farnham, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> See R. H. Wells, *Shakespeare’s Humanism* (Cambridge, 2005); S. Greenblatt, *Shakespeare’s Freedom* (Chicago, 2010), P. Holbrook, *Shakespeare’s Individualism* (Cambridge, 2010); M. Kiernan, *Shakespeare’s Universality* (forthcoming in 2015 in the *Shakespeare Now!* series, and promising to “reclaim the idea of Shakespeare’s timeless universality from reactionary and radical critics alike and reveal its revolutionary potential in the modern world”). Bloom’s influence is palpable, for example in the fact that both Greenblatt

A closely related phenomenon is the rearticulation of such tendencies under the more inclusive banner of “Presentism”, arguably the most significant “post-Theory” development in contemporary English studies.<sup>21</sup> Appropriating this originally derogatory term, the school

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(*Freedom*, 7-17) and Holbrook (*Individualism*, 28-9) make much of the unrepentant murderer Barnardine in *Measure for Measure*, a minor character whom Bloom promotes to the rank of the play’s “imaginative center (and greatest glory)” (*Invention*, 374-80). Published in the same year, Greenblatt’s and Holbrook’s books are also particularly close in their broader arguments for Shakespeare as a champion of modern individualism, as well their avoidance of any historical explanation of this unprecedented achievement. Holbrook is fairly explicit about this relapse into bardolatry (*Individualism*, 22-3), but Greenblatt is more cautious: he cites a phrase by Adorno on Shakespeare’s “breakthrough into mortal and infinitely rich individuality”, and claims that “This breakthrough [...] arose from an unexpected artistic swerve in [Shakespeare’s] work, a startling departure from the norms of beauty that governed Renaissance taste” (*Freedom*, 4). Obviously, however, this merely transfers the question to that of what caused the startling departure, which is never raised, let alone answered. In a sense, this too is orthodoxly Burckhardtian; for him also Shakespeare was ultimately inexplicable. It is telling, though, that Greenblatt’s quotation from Adorno omits a key adjective qualifying the supposed “breakthrough”, namely “Shakespeare’s nominalistic breakthrough into mortal and infinitely rich individuality”; T. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* [1970], ed. G. Adorno and R. Tiedemann (1st ed.), ed. R. Hullot-Kentor (1997; repr. London, 2002), 213. This of course presupposes a very definite and thoroughly Burckhardtian historical framework, as is more explicit elsewhere in Adorno’s work, notably the section “Universal and Particular”, opening with the premise that “Art has been caught up in the total process of nominalism’s advance ever since the medieval *ordo* was broken up” (ibid., 199). In *Shakespeare’s Humanism*, Wells draws on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources, as well as advances in contemporary natural and social sciences, to argue that there is such a thing as universal human nature, that it informs the literature (or at least the “great literature”) of any culture or historical period, and that this was also the view of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The result is an incoherent, meandering argument, mounting a critique of the “presentist” impulse in Foucauldian neohistoricism, remaking the Renaissance in its own anti-humanist image, and yet itself advocating a no less “presentist” approach, ostensibly grounded in a scientifically respectable notion of universal human nature, yet biased in favour of the author’s own ideological agendas. Thus Wells labours to distance himself from the more traditional humanist universalism – “great literature typically concerns itself with conundrums” rather than the “verities” of the human condition (198) – yet his “conundrums” turn out to be the new “eternal verities”. Thus he finds the “pluralist view of ethics” espoused by such twentieth-century thinkers as I. Berlin or N. Rabkin (62-4; cf. Holbrook, *Individualism*, 3-15) in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* and its “dramatic world of stylised conundrums and irresolvable paradoxes” (59), but then emphasizes that pluralist ethics “isn’t unique to Shakespeare. Indeed it might be said to be the basis of much of the world’s greatest literature” (66). The appeal to the contemporary natural and social sciences is irrelevant, for these “universal passions and humours”, shared by human beings “as members of the same species” (192), are simply too universal to make a difference either way. Any understanding of literature beyond this most elementary, species-specific level – including the very idea that there is such a thing as “literature” – is demonstrably historically contingent. Finally, although Wells nominally dismisses Burckhardt’s ideas as outdated (187), it is clear that they continue to underpin the argument, including the obligatory, albeit elliptical, statement of the decline-of-allegory narrative (27).

<sup>21</sup> For the first usage of the term “presentist” in this positive sense, see H. Grady, *Shakespeare’s Universal Wolf* (Oxford, 1996), 4-5, 213-14, acknowledging the influence of “Terence Hawkes’s pioneering studies in the inevitable construction of Shakespearean interpretations in the interpreter’s present”, and describing the approach as “American cultural materialism” – “‘presentist’ in orientation, post-structuralist in theoretical inclination, open to the political insights of Marxism and feminism, and deeply indebted to the watershed contributions to English studies of the late Raymond Williams”. Later contributions include T. Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present* (New York, 2002); E. Fernie, “Shakespeare and the Prospect of Presentism”, *SS* 58 (2005): 169-84; *Spiritual Shakespeares*, ed. E. Fernie (Abingdon, 2005); *Presentist Shakespeares*, ed. H. Grady and T. Hawkes (Abingdon, 2007); *Presentism, Gender and Sexuality in Shakespeare*, ed. E. Gajowski (Basingstoke, 2009); J. O’Rourke, *Rethorizing Shakespeare through Presentist Readings* (New York, 2012); *Shakespeare and the Urgency of Now*, ed. C. DiPietro and H. Grady (Basingstoke, 2013); and most of the titles in the *Shakespeare Now!* series, edited by Fernie and S. Palfrey. So far titles have considered, among other subjects, Shakespeare in relation to atheism, ecology, genetics, performance and reading in prison facilities, anti-empiricist and anti-Cartesian metaphysics, the “poetic history of the ocean”, or critical autobiography – if that is the right term for what is described as a “personal form of criticism” where critics “examine and scrutinise their deepest, most personal and intimate responses to Shakespeare’s plays and poems, to ask themselves if and how

advocates a radical form of the epistemological scepticism already present in New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, which was itself a radicalized approach to a question acknowledged in literary history and historicist literary criticism at least since the early twentieth century – namely, that of the influence of the critic’s “situatedness” in the present in any attempt to recover the literary past. In contrast to earlier views, however, which attempted, in one way or another, to negotiate and overcome this situatedness, Presentism programmatically foregrounds it, and declares it to be absolute.<sup>22</sup> Any engagement with the past is “altogether, always, and already shaped and determined” by the present; “And if it’s always and only the present that makes the past speak, it speaks always and only to – and about – ourselves”; anything else is “fundamentally impossible”.<sup>23</sup> From this premise a further radical conclusion is derived: because it cannot be evaded, the present “does not – cannot – contaminate the past”, so rather than treating it as “an obstacle to be avoided, or a prison to be escaped from”, we are to welcome it with open arms, not merely allowing, but actively encouraging it to govern our readings. Presentist criticism will therefore “deliberately begin

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Shakespeare has made them the person they are”, an approach recommended especially to “teachers who agonise over how to make Shakespeare ‘relevant’”. For an early critique, see R. H. Wells, “Historicism and ‘Presentism’ in Early Modern Studies”, *Cambridge Quarterly* 29 (2000): 37-60.

<sup>22</sup> The exaggerated claims to novelty in some Presentist as well as New Historicist statements have been criticized by Wells, who adduces examples of “old historicists” acknowledging their situatedness as early as 1936 (“Historicism”, *Humanism*, 188-92). In fact, there are even earlier examples, such as this closing paragraph of E. E. Stoll’s *Hamlet: An Historical and Comparative Study* (Minneapolis, 1919), where the question is not only raised, but is resolved into precisely such a genuinely dialectical perspective that is unattainable in the Presentist view: “Even the historical critic cannot utterly escape from the spell and sway of [...] public and private interests and predilections. Look to his author’s purpose and the spirit of the author’s century as he will, he lives in his own century and breathes the same atmosphere as his fellows. [...] even in being historical he follows the bent of the age. But it is the ‘function of criticism’ to look away, to do what one can to escape. And that not merely in order to enter into the spirit of the Elizabethans, the Middle Ages, or the Greeks. Really it is also in order to enter more fully and aware into the spirit of today. Only as we continually break loose from our moorings in the present can we explore the past. Only as we explore the past can we know and appreciate the present” (75). (I quote from the copy available at Archive.org, in which a reader who could not bear to leave it at that pencilled in his own conclusion: “Yes, but part of Shakespeare’s greatness is his ability to peer through the clouds of his own times, and still have an unbefuddled message for each succeeding generation.”)

<sup>23</sup> *Presentist Shakespeares*, ed. Grady and Hawkes, 2-5. Sometimes a dialectic principle seems to be invoked, but on closer inspection it proves merely a rhetorical diversion. For example, it is asked how, “given that what we term history develops out of a never-ending dialogue between past and present, [...] can we decide whose historical circumstances will have priority in the process, Shakespeare’s, or our own?” The implied answer would seem to be the dialectical one, namely “neither”, yet the priority of the present is repeatedly and emphatically asserted: the “centre of gravity will [...] be ‘now’, rather than ‘then’”, etc. Or consider the following passage: “If the present is such a universal and inescapable factor, it necessarily dissolves the possibility of any engagement with a past not *altogether*, always, and already shaped and determined by it. By the same token, all our experience of the ‘present’ is shaped and determined by the past and so *to some degree* only realisable in and on its terms. The truth is we can’t ever step off that roundabout” (emphasis mine). Beneath the appearance of dialectic, as these qualifications plainly indicate, is always a definite bias towards the present.



with the material present and allow that to set its interrogative agenda”, thus “bridging the 400 years of chronological distance that separate us from Shakespeare as a historical object and addressing Shakespeare in the urgency of now”.<sup>24</sup>

Clearly the question arises of what exactly is supposed to be new in such an approach. Is the above not a perfectly adequate description of how Shakespeare has been approached by many critics since the Romantics, by most theatre directors since the epoch-making work of Peter Brook, and by “appropriations” and “reinscriptions” in a variety of other media in still more recent times? Indeed, the Presentists themselves acknowledge that what they do “Perhaps [...] simply makes overt what covertly happens anyway”, and in fact, if their principles are pushed to their logical conclusion, all literary criticism, including the most unrepentantly positivist historicism imaginable, is of necessity a latent presentism.<sup>25</sup> It thus makes perfect sense that Presentism increasingly tends to define itself as an open-ended “movement”, encompassing “a number of different contemporary critical tendencies”, and that the emphasis is shifting from the appropriated “ism” to the even more inclusive label of “now”.<sup>26</sup> But again, none of this is really new: as Grady himself writes, “every era has constructed in own Shakespeare, different from that of other eras, based on its own peculiar preoccupations. How could it be otherwise for us?”<sup>27</sup>

What is genuinely novel and significant about Presentism, however, and what justifies and indeed requires its treatment here, is the word itself: the introduction into contemporary critical discourse of a term which enables us, at long last, to dispense with the venerable model of the pendulum, whereby literary studies are supposed to periodically fluctuate

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 4; *Urgency*, ed. DiPietro and Grady, 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Presentist Shakespeares*, ed. Grady and Hawkes, 4. Cf. H. Grady, “Shakespeare Studies, 2005”, *Shakespeare* 1 (2005): 102-20, pp. 114-15: “there is no historicism that does not imply a latent presentism”. Here again Grady seems to assume a dialectical position, adding that “This doesn’t mean that we cannot develop knowledge of the past”, but again it is almost immediately made clear that no genuine synthesis is intended, and that there can be as many such “knowledges” of the past, all equally valid, as there are presents from the point of which they are to be “known”. Elsewhere, DiPietro and Grady make their position quite clear: the “epistemological barrier” between the present and the past is “approachable” but ultimately “real” (*Urgency*, 4).

<sup>26</sup> *Urgency*, 3-4. Besides this volume, and the already mentioned “minigraph” series *Shakespeare Now!*, see also Fernie’s multi-media project “*The Faerie Queene*” *Now: Remaking Religious Poetry for the Modern World*, affording a vision of what the future might hold if these tendencies continue, as seems highly likely, to meet with institutional support in the “impact”-courting academic culture of our day, to which they are so exceptionally well adapted. Materials relating to the project are available at its website, <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/English/faeriequeene/index.html>; see also E. Fernie, *Redcrosse* (London, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> “Shakespeare Studies”, 115.

between opposing “formalist” and “historicist” poles, and which had thus supposedly taken us from Old Historicism to New Criticism, from New Criticism to New Historicism, and is now poised for another swing in the “formalist” direction. Some still cling to the model, but it seems fairly clear that the recent proliferation of manifestos – for a New Formalism, Historical Formalism, New Humanism, New Aestheticism, New Character Criticism<sup>28</sup> – simply lacks the mobilising potential of the Presentist project. If not before, it should by this point be obvious that the pendulum model has obscured the extent to which (lower-case) presentist agendas have survived throughout these successive tides of academic fashion. What is really at stake, and what has always really been at stake, is not a conflict between “formalism” and “historicism”, but precisely between an approach which, to quote another of Stoll’s elegant formulations, seeks “to make the poet [...] the contemporary of the reader”, and one which seeks “to make the reader for the time being a contemporary of the poet” – in short, between presentism and historicism.<sup>29</sup>

This is not, however, a matter of simply substituting one term for another. The rise to prominence of a self-avowedly presentist school of criticism – “putting one’s cards on the table”<sup>30</sup> – clears the terrain for a fundamental reorientation of debates long plagued by conceptual and terminological confusion, helping us recognize presentism as the lowest

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<sup>28</sup> On New Formalism, see M. Levinson, “What Is New Formalism?”, *PMLA* 122 (2007): 558-69; “Rethinking New Formalism”, ed. R. Sudan, special issue of *PQ* 86 (2007); F. V. Bogel, *New Formalist Criticism* (New York, 2013); *New Formalisms and Literary Theory*, ed. V. Theile and L. Tredennick (New York, 2013). On Historical Formalism, *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism*, ed. J. Cohen (Aldershot, 2007). On New Humanism, M. Haliwell and A. Mousley, *Critical Humanisms* (Edinburgh, 2003); A. Mousley, *Re-Humanising Shakespeare* (Edinburgh, 2007); *Towards a New Literary Humanism*, ed. A. Mousley (New York, 2011). On New Aestheticism, *The New Aestheticism*, ed. J. J. Joughin and S. Malpas (Manchester, 2003); J. Dolven, “Shakespeare and the New Aestheticism”, *Literary Imagination* 5 (2003): 95-109; N. Shrimpton, “The Old Aestheticism and the New”, *Literature Compass* 2 (2005): unpaginated e-text; “Shakespeare and the New Aestheticism”, ed. G. Stanivukovic, special issue of *Shakespeare* 9 (2013).

<sup>29</sup> E. E. Stoll, “Anachronism in Shakespeare Studies”, *MP* 7 (1910): 557-75, p. 557. Cf. DiPietro and Grady, according to whom literary studies continue to oscillate “between two poles [...], that kept reasserting themselves in different forms throughout the twentieth century and continue into the twenty-first, an oscillation that has to do with two competing missions for the field and two different emphases between the original meanings of the texts at their moment of origin and their meaning for us in the present” (4). The term *formalism* emerges as a derogatory misnomer in the Stalinist persecution of artists, intellectuals, and scientists whose work was deemed an affront to official Soviet doctrine; for a useful overview in English, see S. Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 31-42. The term’s application to the Anglo-American New Criticism emerged on the basis of real and perceived affinities with the so-called “Russian Formalism”, and since their work was first presented to Western readers in V. Erlich’s *Russian Formalism* [1955], 4th ed. (The Hague, 1980), it probably post-dates Erlich’s book.

<sup>30</sup> Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present*, 22.

common denominator of a wide array of supposedly independent or even conflicting schools and approaches. Indeed, upper-case Presentists have themselves begun to insist on the inclusiveness of their “movement”: “the old new historicism, cultural materialism, feminism, gay and queer criticism, post-colonial criticism and performances are all instances of presentist practice” *avant la lettre*, taking as their “point of origin the cultural present”.<sup>31</sup> Particularly significant here is the inclusion of approaches previously identified as “historicist”, an identification which now proves deeply problematic, and to a large degree untenable. Presentism has continually emphasized its kinship and continuity not only with Cultural Materialism – where this continuity is obvious through the direct involvement of prominent figures like Dollimore or Hawkes – but also the New Historicism, foregrounding the strong presentist bias in the work of both schools.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, this view is shared by the Presentists’ adversaries – the more rigorous historicists designated by such labels as the New New Historicism, New Materialism, New Boredom – who foreground the same bias for the opposite reason, to distance themselves from these schools, now found to be rife with “exactly the narcissism that history should counter”, and “too overtly self-interested to be compelling as historical accounts, significant more as records our present needs and anxieties than as reconstructions of those of Shakespeare’s time”.<sup>33</sup> Finally, this presentist bias is now also acknowledged, affirmatively, by some of the New Historicists themselves.<sup>34</sup> By an

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<sup>31</sup> Grady, “Shakespeare Studies”, 114.

<sup>32</sup> In Grady’s original appropriation of the term, it is used “to emphasize the very ‘presentist’, theoretical aspects of cultural materialism and cultural poetics that are in danger of disappearing as the dust of the recent paradigm shift settles and we enter a period of ‘normal science’” (Wolf, 213). Contributing an Afterword to Fernie’s *Spiritual Shakespeares*, Dollimore commends the collection’s stated aim to “reinvigorate and strengthen politically progressive materialist criticism” (3). For Fernie himself, “established new historicism is a complex practice and so – already – is presentism”; “historicism and presentism are oddly at one” (“Prospect”, 169, 173). See also M. Robson, “Presentism”, in *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory*, gen. ed. M. Ryan (Malden, 2011): the “presentist project appears to be a reformation and reinvigoration of cultural materialism rather than a ‘new’ critical mode as such” (789).

<sup>33</sup> D. S. Kastan, *Shakespeare after Theory* (New York, 1999), 13; by contrast, Kastan advocates an increased “attention to the specific material and institutional conditions of [...] discursive exchanges”, and “a sharper focus on the material relations of discourse to the world in which it circulates” – “something that Peter Stallybrass and I, usually gleefully, have come to think of as ‘The New Boredom’” (13-14). See P. Fumerton, “Introduction: A New New Historicism”, in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, ed. P. Fumerton and S. Hunt (Philadelphia, 1999); J. G. Harris, “The New New Historicism’s *Wunderkammer* of Objects”, *European Journal of English Studies* 4 (2000): 111-23; D. Bruster, “The New Materialism in Renaissance Studies”, in *Material Culture and Cultural Materialism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. C. Perry (Turnhout, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Commenting, for example, in his Foreword to the 2004 edition of Dollimore’s *Radical Tragedy*, on the “pessimism” distinguishing the New Historicism from its more “optimist” British counterpart, T. Eagleton not

apparently general consensus, then, the old map of the discipline has outlived its usefulness, and even the new divide, between declared Presentists on the one hand and more rigorous historicists or materialists on the other, perhaps finds its lowest common denominator in the old divide between the “critic” and the “scholar”.<sup>35</sup>

It may be also noted at this point that the presentist agenda is compatible with two different and often incompatible accounts of modernity: not only the Burckhardtian model discussed above, in which modernity emerges at the Renaissance, and is a good thing, but also with the antimodernist model – notably, in the present context, that of Michel Foucault – in which modernity emerges after the Renaissance, and is a bad thing. Consequently, when the Burckhardtian modernist looks to the past, he sees the familiar three-part scheme in which the protomodernity of classical antiquity is temporarily lost to the Middle Ages, but is eventually restored at the Renaissance, and extends uninterruptedly into the present time. For the

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only describes it as “much concerned with interpreting the past in the light of the present”, but ventures to historicize this concern, positing that the “pessimistic sense that protest in Jacobean drama is always nullified, is a reading of it in the light of the bleak situation of present-day radicals in a triumphantly right-wing United States” (xii). Far from rejecting such imputations, Greenblatt happily concedes the point in the anniversary edition of his own Cold War classic, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, confirming that the book’s “vision of an immense malevolent force determined to crush all resistance” indeed is one of “many traces of that profoundly disorienting time”, namely the late 1970s, and that “Many of the anecdotes with which I attempt to illuminate Renaissance texts had a special contemporary resonance” (xvi). Nor is its vision pessimistic: on the contrary, “an ineradicable principle of hope” courses throughout the book, surfacing most explicitly in the “somewhat perplexed declaration of faith” disclosed in its Epilogue, where, it will be remembered, “Renaissance figures” inhabit “our culture”, and where their power and freedom in shaping their lives is not only “the very hallmark of the Renaissance” but also “an important element in my own sense of myself”; “The project was not merely descriptive: the goal was to enable us to escape what we detest and embrace whatever brings us wonder, hope, and pleasure” (xvi-xvii).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. N. Parvini, “The Scholars and the Critics”, *Shakespeare* 10 (2014): 212-23. While timely and stimulating – especially in her identification of New Historicists and Cultural Materialists as “critics ‘doing history’ rather than scholars ‘doing criticism’” (214) – Parvini’s analysis is flawed in other respects by her plea for the affirmation of contemporary criticism, perceived as under threat from “a form of historicism that I like to call the ‘new’ old antiquarianism” (212). This plea is based on a skewed account of the respective provinces of the scholar and the critic, the former’s supposedly being “data, facts and historical details”, the latter’s “language, form, genre and literary influence” (214). Leaving aside the problematic category of “form”, which needs to be further specified to be useful in such a context – is close reading attention to “form”?; is “pure interpretation”, as Parvini describes the work of G. W. Knight, an attention to “form”? – language, genre, and influence have certainly been the domain of the “scholar” at least as much as of the “critic”. Consequently, Parvini also fails to recognize in “Presentism” a variety of “criticism” in the traditional sense of the word, viewing it as “a development of original political impetus of cultural materialism” (217). As any nineteenth- or early twentieth-century source will show, however, the work of the “critic” is by definition presentist in orientation. Here, for example, is G. B. Harrison’s once-standard handbook *Introducing Shakespeare* [1939], 3rd ed. (London, 1966): “The scholar says in effect, ‘Shakespeare’s plays are now more than three hundred and fifty years old; since then the English language, manners, and ideas have changed greatly. To understand him we must know Shakespeare’s environment and examine his plays in the conditions of their original composition.’ The attitude of the critic, on the other hand, is that great literature is timeless and therefore perpetually modern. He is not concerned with antiquity but with certain works of dramatic art and how they concern him” (78).

Foucauldian antimodernist, however, the “essential rupture in the Western world” occurs around the middle of the seventeenth century, marking the end of the Renaissance, whereas the whole of Western history up to that point is fundamentally of a piece.<sup>36</sup> This is the Enlightenment’s own view of history, with the value judgments inverted: instead of emerging from darkness into light, the antimodernist feels himself banished from light into darkness, from prelapsarian bliss into a radically anomalous fallen state.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, both Burckhardt and Foucault report apocalyptic premonitions about a further epoch just beyond the horizon, yet these are, again, diametrically opposite: to Burckhardt, the close of the nineteenth century feels like a twilight, fading into the night of the terrible simplifiers, whereas to Foucault the close of the twentieth is a dawn, soon to give rise to “some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility”.<sup>38</sup> In spite of these obvious differences, however, the two views have one thing in common. Crucially, in the context of the present discussion, they both look back on the Renaissance as a mirror of their own positions and concerns – “poststructuralism rediscovered what the Renaissance already knew”; Shakespeare “is always ahead of you, [...] whoever and whenever you are”<sup>39</sup> – which,

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<sup>36</sup> M. Foucault, *The Order of Things* [1966] (1970; repr. London, 2004), 55. Foucault uses a variety of period concepts and date ranges to refer to and delimit this transformative event, and the historical epoch, or epochs, presumed to have ensued in its wake, and also gives varying estimates of its/their role in the emergence of Western modernity. In *The Order of Things*, for example, the “essential rupture” is sometimes placed, as in the above-quoted passage, in the mid-seventeenth century, inaugurating the Classical Age; elsewhere in the book, “the fundamental event” is said to have “occurred in the Western *episteme* towards the end of the eighteenth century” (270); elsewhere still, we have not one but “two great discontinuities in the *episteme* of Western culture: the first inaugurates the Classical age (roughly half-way through the seventeenth century) and the second, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, marks the beginning of the modern age” (xxiv; cf. xxvi on “the threshold that separates us from Classical thought and constitutes our modernity”). In the broader picture it is clear that these minor inconsistencies are not of great importance, as all of them are palpably variations on the more traditional notion of Enlightenment modernity.

<sup>37</sup> It is in this sense that Foucault’s position was first diagnosed as antimodernist by J. Habermas, “Modernity: An Unfinished Project”, in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*, ed. M. Passerin d’Entrèves and S. Benhabib (Cambridge, Mass. 1997), 53. The extensive debate that ensued does not invalidate this original estimate, provided it is remembered that it does not relate to those of Foucault’s texts that were unpublished or indeed unwritten at the time when Habermas wrote his classic essay (1980), notably “What is Enlightenment?”, trans. C. Porter, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (New York, 1984), and associated posthumously published writings in *The Politics of Power*, ed. S. Lotringer, trans. L. Hochroth and C. Porter (Los Angeles, 2007). This work does present a more nuanced approach to the problem of modernity, but as its impact on literary criticism has been negligible there is no need to discuss it here.

<sup>38</sup> Foucault, *Order*, 422. Burckhardt’s famous phrase, found in a letter of 24 July 1889, is often cited without a source; see *The Letters of Jacob Burckhardt*, ed. A. Dru (London, 1955): “The picture I have formed of the *terribles simplificateurs* who are going to descend upon poor old Europe is not an agreeable one” (220).

<sup>39</sup> Dollimore, *Tragedy*, lxi; H. Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York, 1994), 24.

translated into critical and pedagogical practice, inevitably gives rise to latent and eventually manifest Presentism.

I leave further discussion of these developments for the Afterword. The above is meant only to indicate the basic outlines of the polemic raised by an inquiry into the place of allegory in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama, and the high stakes riding on these particular configurations of the allegory-modernity nexus, and the critical modes they seek to legitimize. Whereas most texts discussed in the preceding chapter of this thesis get read only by specialists, and even among them only a happy few, the drama, headed by the illustrious figure of Shakespeare, is of course the flagship item on the pre-1700 syllabus, and often metonymous with the entire discipline. To take a random example, commenting, in October 2013, on a 20% decline in English majors at his institution over the past thirty years, an English professor at the University of Virginia did not feel apprehensive about the trend, for as he put it, “In the end we can’t lose [...]. We have William Shakespeare.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, many of those who insist on Shakespeare’s modernity – an insistence which is then often extended, at least implicitly, to the period more broadly – do not perceive it as merely an intellectual position to be adopted, but as a vested professional interest, and there is every reason to believe that this interest will be defended with increasing zeal and militancy as the debates on the status of the humanities continue into an economically and politically uncertain future. To its adherents, the intellectual commitment to presentism may not, in the final instance, be clearly distinguishable from the existential commitment to holding on to their jobs, or even the ethical commitment to being a decent, progressive, socially responsible human being.<sup>41</sup>

What is, however, more immediately relevant to the present discussion is that such criticism often verges on, and is sometimes indistinguishable from, allegoresis. Like

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<sup>40</sup> T. Lewin, “As Interest Fades in the Humanities, Colleges Worry”, *The New York Times*, online edition, 30 October 2013, unpaginated e-text.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, the opening sentences of Mousley’s *New Literary Humanism*: “Utilitarian governmental initiatives, driven as all else by that unintelligible modern god called ‘the economy’, may yet succeed in reducing education to skills, thereby endangering some of the traditional humanist imperatives of education. However, ‘we’ (meaning, for the purpose of this volume, ‘we’ of the academic community of English) may now, albeit belatedly, be reaching a position of being able to explicitly defend such imperatives instead of acquiescing (or seeming to) in their demise” (1). More recently, DiPietro and Grady steer the argument even more explicitly into ethical terrain, charging non-presentist or latently presentist approaches with “threaten[ing] the socially critical mission of literary education in our society” (6).

allegoresis, presentist criticism seeks to perform the ideological maintenance of a canonical work at a time when its textual stabilization has imposed limits on alternative modes of such maintenance; it resorts to the premise of modernity in order to legitimize its readings, and the greater the gap this modernity is required to bridge, the more mysterious must be the ways in which it is supposed to work; while it thus seeks to escape the constraints of the work's historicity, it also seeks to elude its textuality, either by focusing on detail to the exclusion of the wider context, or by focusing on generalized categories abstracted from their verbal and textual particularity. This is why any presentism will feel threatened by a rigorous "formalism" no less than by a rigorous "historicism", and why, lest anyone forget it, "mere reading, [...] prior to any theory, is able to transform critical discourse in a manner that would appear deeply subversive to those who think of the teaching of literature as a substitute for the teaching of theology, ethics, psychology, or intellectual history".<sup>42</sup>

The final sections of this chapter deal with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the play most commonly and most intensely identified with precisely those aspects of literary modernity to which allegory is, in the traditional view, most inimical. Precisely for this reason, however, *Hamlet* also occasions some of the best examples of how readings operating on this premise habitually turn into their very opposite, with the prince's much-vaunted inwardness and individuality evaporating precisely as the reading they legitimize draws to its climax. In Hazlitt's *Characters*, for instance, Hamlet's reality is categorically asserted and then categorically denied in the space of a single paragraph: "Hamlet is a name: his speeches and sayings but the idle coinages of the poet's brain. What then, are they not real? They are as real as our own thoughts. Their reality is in the reader's mind. It is *we* who are Hamlet".<sup>43</sup> Alternatively, the prince is revealed to be an allegory not of his readers but of his creator: a typical example is found in Ward, who joins the chorus praising Shakespeare's "power of characterisation" as his "supreme excellence", and *Hamlet* as its "most marvellously profound instance", only for Hamlet to ultimately turn out to be a mere "type into which [Shakespeare]

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<sup>42</sup> P. de Man, "The Return to Philology" [1982], in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis, 1986), 24.

<sup>43</sup> W. Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* (London, 1817), 104.

poured so many of his deepest and innermost thoughts”, rather than possessing any of his own.<sup>44</sup>

Endless further examples could be cited, eventually reaching Bloom and his strange Presentist bedfellows. Needless to say, the Presentists strenuously deny any such fellowship, and would insist on the superiority of their epistemologically enlightened approach over the traditional universalism revived in *The Invention of the Human*.<sup>45</sup> But if the present “does not – cannot – *contaminate* the past”, then what exactly is the problem with imposing on Shakespeare, “as many teachers seem unthinkingly to do, some kind of absurd contemporaneity with ourselves, usually justified by windy rhetoric about the Bard’s ‘universality’”?<sup>46</sup> Why would such an approach be less valid than any other? What, in terms of actual critical practice, is the difference between extreme epistemological naiveté and extreme epistemological scepticism – between interpreting the past in the light of the present because we fail to comprehend a difference between the two, and because we believe this difference to be incomprehensible?

Bloom’s reading of *Hamlet* presents us with further striking instances of Hamlet’s much-vaunted individuality turning into its very opposite, indeed combining the two modes illustrated above from Ward and Hazlitt: the allegory of the reader, as one might call it, and the allegory of the author. Thus Hamlet’s individuality and interiority are tirelessly exhorted, to the point where he “ceases to represent himself and becomes [...] a universal figure” – and yet, at the same time, “personifies Shakespeare’s Negative Capability”.<sup>47</sup> “At the end, Hamlet is no longer a real personage condemned to suffer inside a play, and the wrong play at that. The personage and the play dissolve into each other, until we have only the cognitive music of ‘let be’ and ‘Let it be.’”<sup>48</sup> But why should this presentism be more absurd than that of Hawkes

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<sup>44</sup> *History*, 1: 510-11

<sup>45</sup> Affording us in the process some comically blatant instances of the “anxiety of influence”, as when Grady takes to trashing Bloom’s “attempt to revive nineteenth-century characterology, along with some thin formalism and a lot of ego” – a “preposterous thesis” which “no one seems to have taken it very seriously”, and whose “impact is already proving to be short-lived” (“Shakespeare Studies”, 105).

<sup>46</sup> *Presentist Shakespeares*, ed. Grady and Hawkes, 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Invention of the Human*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*



or Grady? Clearly the problem with the “windy rhetoric of the Bard’s universality” is ideological rather than epistemological.<sup>49</sup>

In conclusion, although written many years ago, Frye’s words have lost little of their relevance, and “Many of our best and wisest critics” continue to

tend to think of literature as primarily instructive, or as, in Arnold’s phrase, a criticism of life. They feel that its essential function is to illuminate something about life, or reality, or experience, or whatever we call the immediate world outside literature.

They thus tend, whether they say so or not, to think of literature, taken as a whole, as a vast imaginative allegory, the end of which is a deeper understanding of the nonliterary center of experience.<sup>50</sup>

The closer the allegorist gets to this centre, the more the object of his interpretation, in both its verbal and historical dimension, gets in the way. And as play, protagonist, and playwright collapse into one another, as history fades into the present and the present into history, we emerge into the ultimate fantasy of the allegorist: a text emptied of all identity and meaning, infinitely malleable and accommodating to hermeneutical manipulation. “Shakespeare’s plays have no essential meanings, but function as resources which we use to generate meaning for our own purposes. [...] Shakespeare doesn’t mean: *we* mean *by* Shakespeare.”<sup>51</sup>

## FROM EVERYMAN TO OTHELLO?

Returning now to the Burckhardtian model of the history of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama, it is easy to see how it might seem that there is abundant evidence to support it. English drama of this period indeed does see a decline in the overt representation of religious subjects, a diminished use of personified abstractions in favour of characters bearing proper names, and the replacement of the nowhere land of the earlier moralities by at least

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<sup>49</sup> Thus, for example, Bloom is out, but Kott is in – “a milestone work of a previous generation with specific Presentist principles” (*Urgency*, ed. DiPietro and Grady, 8, n. 7) – clearly not because *The Invention of the Human* is any less presentist than *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, but because Kott’s presentism is found to be ideologically flattering whereas Bloom’s is not.

<sup>50</sup> N. Frye, *A Natural Perspective* (New York, 1965), 2.

<sup>51</sup> T. Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (1992; repr. New York, 2005), unpaginated abstract.

nominally particularized settings. These are all matters of empirical fact and they present problems of the highest order in English literary history. There are a number of reasons, however, proceeding from an ever-increasing body of research, to reconsider both the facts themselves, and especially their traditional interpretations. While the allegorical dimension of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century drama often needs to be unearthed through close reading and historical contextualization, it is just as often hiding in plain sight, where its recognition is a matter of getting the facts straight, readjusting one's focus, and rethinking the problem at a fundamental level.<sup>52</sup> Before proceeding, in final sections of this chapter, to demonstrate the former in my engagement with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the play usually understood as epitomising the traditional paradigm, the present section will briefly elaborate the latter claim, and will seek to demonstrate the benefits of looking at the period's dramatic corpus and its historical development through the lens of the allegorical poetics discussed in the previous chapter.

This requires a careful disentangling of a number of issues typically conflated in most previous scholarship. The question of overt religious subject matter in the drama needs to be distinguished from the question of dramatic allegory, dramatic allegory itself needs to be distinguished from the use of personifications, and the use of personifications needs to be

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<sup>52</sup> The scholarship on allegory in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century drama is scarce. As correctly and timely noted in J. Campana's call for papers for the forthcoming special issue of *SEL* on "Staging Allegory", "In spite of some notable exceptions, theories of allegory tend to dwell on poetry, prose, and other modalities of language while theories of early modern theatricality tend to neglect allegory. Those steeped in Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* tend to be less interested in what theatre brings to conversations about allegory and what happens to the symbolic and linguistic properties of allegory when staged. Even scholarship on quasi-allegorical works, such as the masque, tends not to foreground or conceptualize allegory except incidentally. As such, the body of writing on theatre and allegory in early modernity is relatively limited." While some of the contributions to the study of the allegorical element in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama will receive mention here, the converse phenomenon, relative neglect of drama in allegory studies, would merit a discussion which exceeds the scope of the present chapter. Certainly one reason for this neglect is the lack of classical precedent, which itself arises largely from the drama's natural gravitation towards the verisimilar. As discussed above, it is no coincidence that the explicit requirement of allegory in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetics survives longest in relation to the representation of the very lowest and the very highest, pastoral and epic, shepherds and gods. By contrast, the focus of the major classical dramatic genres, comedy and tragedy, falls between these two ends of the spectrum, and when they appear, the supernatural and the rustic generally do so as intrusions into a predominantly verisimilar and urban world. Consequently, the drama's edifying function could often be conceptualized solely under the aegis of the *exemplum*, as in the opening sentences of the fragment by the late classical grammarian Donatus, which exercised, along with that of Evanthius, an immense influence on the premodern theory of drama, especially before, but even after, the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics*: "Comedy is a [form of] drama containing the various designs of public and private individuals' desires. Through them people learn what is useful in life and what, on the other hand ought to be avoided"; *Sources of Dramatic Theory*, ed. M. J. Sidnell (1991; repr. Cambridge, 1999), 1: 79.

distinguished from the notion of the “morality play”.<sup>53</sup> While it did, eventually, put an end to the old mystery cycles, the initial effect of the Reformation was to increase and broaden the scope of English non-cycle religious drama, notably through the emergence of Protestant variety of such drama in the 1530s, and the responses of Catholic playwrights to this challenge.<sup>54</sup> Alongside these rival non-cycle forms, falling by turns in and out of royal and ecclesiastical favour as England careened between the old and the new faith, the mystery cycles, often revised to comply with Protestant doctrine, continued to be widely performed until about the 1570s, and would not completely expire, at least in western and northern provinces, until the end of the century.<sup>55</sup> If anything, the mid-century decades saw the drama become an increasingly important medium for religious and political polemic and propaganda, so that one way of tracing its impact is by following the trail of regulative documents that it begins leaving in its wake already by the 1530s, documents which show the successive mid-century regimes both utilizing dramatic representation of religious and political matters, and at the same time attempting to harness its volatile nature through regulation on both local and national level.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> As further discussed below, I will employ the term “personification play” to refer to plays whose cast consists wholly or predominantly of personified abstractions, avoiding the familiar terminology of the “moral”, “moral play”, “morality”, and “morality play”, which is problematic in the present context as not all the plays that can plausibly be designated by these terms contain such a predominantly personificational cast. Strictly speaking, I am concerned with the use of personifications, whether or not it is accompanied by the presence of Everyman and Vice figures, a strong didactic focus, or any other feature linked with the notion of the “morality play”. On the issues raised by this notion and the associated terminology, see esp. A. C. Dessen, “The Morall as an Elizabethan Dramatic Kind”, *Comparative Drama* 5 (1971): 138-59.

<sup>54</sup> Drama was already being used for such purposes by advocates of the old regime: see G. Walker’s chapter on *Godly Queen Hester* in *Reading Literature Historically* (Edinburgh, 2013), discussing this play as part of “a concerted strategy adopted by defenders of the institutional church to take advantage of the fall of Cardinal Wolsey and to head off the fierce assault on clerical liberties and prerogatives that had been launched in the first session of the Reformation Parliament” (38). See E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage* (1903; repr. London, 1963), 2: 219-20, for an anti-Lutheran morality performed by St Paul’s boys before the French ambassadors in 1527, and other pro-Catholic plays performed in Wolsey’s household in 1528. Protestant plays were being actively encouraged and perhaps commissioned from Bale and other Protestant playwrights by c. 1530: see *English Professional Theatre*, ed. G. Wickham, H. Berry, and W. Ingram (Cambridge, 2000), 20-1.

<sup>55</sup> The Kendal Corpus Christi play, apparently suppressed only in 1605, is cited as the longest surviving recorded mystery cycle in England, and was still remembered and discussed as late as 1638; see *REED: Cumberland, Westmorland, Gloucestershire*, ed. A. Douglas and P. Greenfield (Toronto, 1986), 17-19; C. Davidson, *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (Aldershot, 2007), 69-71.

<sup>56</sup> These have been examined by numerous scholars since the first comprehensive study by V. C. Gildersleeve, *Government Regulation of the Elizabethan Drama* (New York, 1908). More recently, see J. Clare, *Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatic Censorship* (Manchester, 1990); R. Dutton, *Mastering the Revels* (Basingstoke, 1991), and *Licensing, Censorship and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2000). For the primary documents I rely mainly on Wickham’s edition in *Theatre*, ed. Wickham, Berry, and Ingram, 15-149.

These regulative measures most likely account for the dramatic decline in overtly religious non-cycle drama in the 1550s, one of the more striking features uncovered in my analysis of the surviving corpus. As presented in Figure 1, the share of non-cycle religious drama rises sharply in the 1530s (59%) and 1540s (49%), but then sees a marked drop in the 1550s (20%). This is further supported by the pattern exhibited by the lost religious plays, not included in the main analysis, many of which were aggressively topical and partisan in nature; over forty such plays are recorded in 1530-50, compared to some thirteen for the whole second half of the century.<sup>57</sup> The interpretation of these figures seems obvious: clearly the more rigid and increasingly pre-emptive regulation of plays in the reign of Edward VI, and later reinforced and intensified in the reigns of Mary I and Elizabeth I, had considerable effect. The second of Edward's proclamations, of 28 April 1551, seems a turning point here, being the first such piece of legislation to make provisions not only for the suppression of plays already being performed, but also for their pre-emptive regulation through licensing, demonstrating "a dawning consciousness in Court circles that a form of censorship will have to be imposed on the subject matter of all stage plays *in advance* of their performance".<sup>58</sup> It is precisely from this moment onwards that we see a marked decline in overtly religious non-cycle drama, which means that this decline cannot be interpreted as evidence of secularization, but is rather, in all probability, due to censorship, and thus testifies to the continuing and indeed increasing interest of religious subject matter to mid-century

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<sup>57</sup> M. Wiggins, *British Drama, 1533-1642: A Catalogue*, with C. Richardson (Oxford, 2012-), lists about fifty such lost plays between 1533 and 1603: in addition to the lost plays of John Bale, see those numbered 5, 6, 7, 9, 26, 34, 36, 40, 41, 58, 76, 82, 90, 92, 98, 100, 141, 155, 156, 157, 158, 162, 164, 170, 186, 188, 210, 276, 293, 295, 335, 377, 381, 402, 479, 592, 774, 815, 830, 1093, and 1136.

<sup>58</sup> *Theatre*, ed. Wickham, Berry, and Ingram, 35. Some months later, in his 1551 *De regno Christi*, presented to Edward at Christmas that year, M. Bucer also advocated regime-sponsored religious drama on the condition of its pre-emptive censoring: "So that Christ's people [...] may profit from religious comedies and tragedies, men will have to be appointed to the task of preventing the performance of any comedy or tragedy which they have not seen beforehand and decided should be acted"; quoted in G. Wickham, *Early English Stages* (1959-81; repr. London, 2002), 2.1: 329.

Date	Overtly religious non-cycle plays (%)	Personifications (%)	Person. plays (%)	Pure person. plays (%)	Mixed person. plays (%)
1400-1530	35	38	38	32	6
1530s	59	36	37	32	5
1540s	48	43	43	33	10
1550s	20	39	47	27	20
1560s	14	38	37	20	17
1570s	18	32	37	23	14
1580s	0	10	14	2	12
1590s	0	3	2	0	2

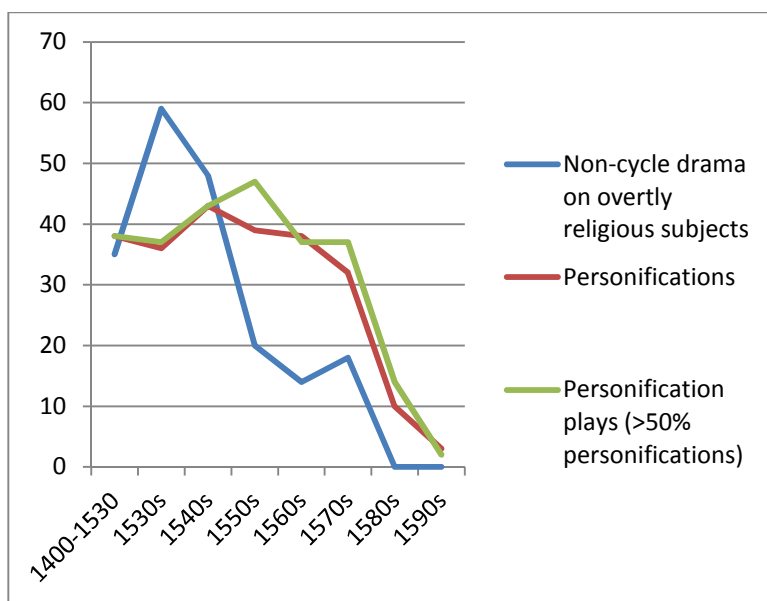
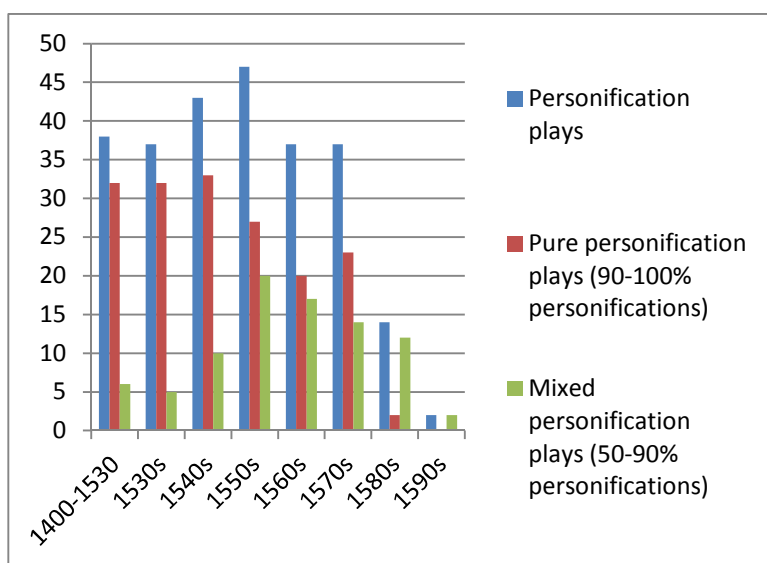


Figure 1. Analysis of three trends in sixteenth-century non-cycle drama: overt religious subject matter, employment of personifications, and the personification play, “pure” and “mixed”. All the figures are relative and expressed as percentages. Due to the highly fragmentary nature of the pre-1530 record – with only a single extant play, according to the *Annals* dating, from the 1500s – a decade-by-decade for this period analysis is impossible, and 1400-1530 has been treated as a unit. This procedure seems validated by the fact that the figures for the personifications and personification plays for 1400-1530 are strikingly consistent with those for the 1540s: 38%-36% (personifications), 38%-37% (person. plays), 32%-32% (pure), 6%-5% (mixed). The figures are based on Harbage’s *Annals*, 3rd ed. (London, 1989) for 1400-1533, and Wiggins’ *Catalogue* for 1533-1600. The survey excludes all pre-1400 materials, cycle plays, masques, pageants, and other types of dramatic or semi-dramatic entertainments, lost and fragmentary plays (except where a play’s overall character can be inferred with reasonable certainty), and translations of classical (but not contemporary plays), with the exception of Watson’s *Antigone*, with its original allegorical *pompae*.



playwrights and their audiences.<sup>59</sup>

Nor is there anything secular or neutral about the way in which the focus of the legislative documents gradually shifts from censoring religious drama belonging to a particular confessional faction to censoring all overtly religious drama irrespective of its allegiance. Thus one of the best known and most important of these documents, Elizabeth's second proclamation of 16 May 1559, forbids all plays "wherein either matters of religion or of governance of the estate of the Commonwealth shall be handled, or treated"<sup>60</sup> – in other words, precisely the two domains Elizabeth herself embodies as England's queen and the Supreme Head of its national church. Again, however, the rationale for these measures is the abiding interest in the religious drama and its volatile subject matter: these are "no meet matters to be written or treated upon but by men of authority, learning and wisdom, nor to be

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<sup>59</sup> The myth of the demise of the religious drama in the wake of the Reformation maintains its grip even on scholars who vocally discard other aspects of traditional scholarship. We find it, for example, in a somewhat modified form, in the Introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, ed. T. Betteridge and G. Walker (Oxford, 2012), even though the editors are careful to specify that the religiously motivated anti-theatricalism they find at work in the mid-sixteenth century is "not [...] specifically Protestant", but common to "all zealots, protestant and catholic" (5-7). Yet in exemplifying this "emerging split between those godly Christians on either side of the confessional divide [...] and the rest of the populace" the familiar divide emerges: the views of the non-zealot majority are related to pre-Reformation plays – the Digby *Mary Magdalene* and the York *Crucifixion* pageant – whereas the zealots are represented primarily by Bale, although *Everyman* also receives a passing mention. The key feature of non-zealot drama is that it fully embraces theatricality in its handling of religious subjects, indeed that it *is* religious devotion in theatrical form: "A play like the Digby *Mary Magdalene* with its mix of the comic and the sacred, Scripture and hagiography, myth, allegory, and folklore, embodied a degree of generic and thematic mixing that all godly religious reformers found unacceptable"; "To be part of the performance of *The Crucifixion* was an act of devotion, and the theatrical nature of the event was a key element in its devotional meaning" (5-6). Only in the light of such a definition of "religious drama" can one describe such plays as Bale's – which certainly dealt with religious matters, but just as certainly did not aspire to the status of actual devotional practice – as "forcibly divorced from religion, with profound consequences for its place within popular culture" (5). This is an easily conceded point, but one of very limited significance: clearly it does not present a valid reason to deny the title of religious drama in the usual sense of the term – i.e., drama *about* religion, rather than drama *as* religion – to the plays of Bale and his zealot contemporaries. Presumably Betteridge and Walker realize this, and are thus cornered into an even weaker argument – elaborated at more length in J. Simpson's chapter on Bale's *Three Laws* in the same collection – namely, that at those points at which they turn to religion, Bale's plays cease being plays. Unlike in the non-zealot drama, which fully embraces "theatrical complexity", here "for a character to be explicitly theatrical (if this means to play with language, to mock, joke and perform comic business, and to self-consciously refer to oneself as a figure in a play) is to be marked as a vice, a papist, and as inherently lacking in authority". Thus "when a character is speaking with authority" in a play by Bale or some other Tudor zealot, "their words are not 'performed'; it is as though they are speaking not as a character but rather simply reading a written polemical or instructive text", and are in this way "protect[ed] from the taint of theatricality" (6-7). Surely such a selective definition of drama, built on one dramatic style to the exclusion of another, cannot hold. Instead of resorting to such tortuous and improvised arguments, scholars need to simply acknowledge that the English drama of 1530-50, including that of Bale and his Protestant contemporaries, is obviously and indeed vehemently religious. Any attempt to gloss over this simple fact will, in the final analysis, only perpetuate the outdated critical traditions that Betteridge and Walker elsewhere so timely and cogently criticize.

<sup>60</sup> *Theatre*, ed. Wickham, Berry, and Ingram, 51.

handled before any audience but of grave and discreet persons”.<sup>61</sup> Such an approach is also politically prudent. In the context of the precarious regimes of Edward and Mary, and the early days of Elizabeth’s reign, it represents a way of silencing the opposition without explicitly antagonizing it by a one-sided, overtly partisan piece of legislation. Throughout this period, dramatic representations of matters of religion comprised largely of the remaining mystery cycles on the one hand, relicts of the old faith repugnant to hard-line Protestants, and on the other, the aggressively Protestant non-cycle drama in Bale’s vein, which was equally repugnant to Catholics, and which is known to have been a cause of some diplomatic concern in the early years of Elizabeth’s reign.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, this strategy of silencing both adversary factions without pointing fingers at either would become additionally expedient as the Church of England consolidated its position of a *via media* between Papist and Puritan extremism. Before this position was established, the regime simply did not *have* such openly propagandist religious drama at hand as would advocate its view in a way that would clearly distinguish it from that of the radicals. Once it was established, however, it no longer *needed* it, even though it continued to tolerate, as the ensuing discussion of *Hamlet* will amply illustrate, generous amounts of both anti-Papist and anti-Puritan satire.<sup>63</sup> The second and final demise of overt religious drama after c.1580 is thus not evidence of secularization, but rather of the consolidation and growing influence of one particular religious faction, namely the Church of England.

In order to further corroborate this claim, we must now turn from the pattern obtained for the non-cycle religious drama to that obtained for the use of personifications and the personification play. While there is a high degree of correlation between the use of personifications and the personification play, the correlation between these trends and the rise

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> See D. Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), ch. 10, esp. 127-9.

<sup>63</sup> Such a perspective also sheds further light on the sources and dynamics of the anti-theatrical controversy. Is the anti-theatrical campaign wholly explicable in terms of the familiar arguments – idolatry, immorality, Sabbath-breaking, health hazard – actually employed by its proponents? Except for the latter, all of these are found fully articulated already in the Lollard *Treatise on Miraclis Pleyinge*, and were certainly available to such men as Bale or Bucer, yet this did not prevent them from using or advocating the use of religious drama for their cause. Later on, however, a stage regulated by a regime firmly aligned with the Church of England was of no use, and indeed of some harm, to the Puritan faction, and while there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the protests on the grounds of irreligion and immorality, one imagines that the assault would have been considerably lesser had this faction also been able to use the stage for voicing its views.

and decline of non-cycle religious drama is only partial. The share of personifications and personification-based drama in the total corpus remains relatively constant, around 40%, for almost two centuries, and then drops dramatically around 1580.<sup>64</sup> To begin with, this conclusively disproves the traditional view of the passage from the “allegorical” drama of the Middle Ages to the “realist” drama of the Renaissance – unless, of course, one is willing to extend the Middle Ages up to around 1580.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, we see a close alignment of the use of personifications with the personification play, the only notable divergence occurring at

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. Norland’s analysis, according to which moralities comprise less than 5% of the surviving fifteenth-century drama, a figure which then rises to 20% in the first two thirds of the sixteenth century, falling to less than 10% only in the 1580s, leading him to conclude that “the morality play in England is essentially a sixteenth-century phenomenon that grows in popularity as the century progresses until it peaks in the early years of Elizabeth’s reign”; H. B. Norland, *Drama in Early Tudor Britain* (Lincoln, 1995), 37-8. There are two major methodological problems here. The first is the inclusion of the cycle drama, based on a completely different infrastructure than the non-cycle drama, obscures the data really relevant to the morality play. It is true that the moralities comprise less than 5% of the surviving fifteenth-century drama; it is also true, however, and much more relevant, that they comprise 43% of the surviving *non-cycle* fifteenth-century drama, a figure which remains relatively constant until about 1580. Secondly, Norland fails to take into account the fragmentary nature of the pre-1530 record, the implications of which have already been mentioned above (Figure 1). If the perspective is adjusted so that the 1400-1530 period – 31 non-cycle plays in my analysis – is taken as a unit on par with the decade segments for the remainder of the century, then the inadequacy of Norland’s view of the morality play as a sixteenth-century phenomenon becomes additionally visible, as the correspondence between the figures for 1400-1530 and 1530-80 is simply too exact to be accidental. An early and overstated argument for the persistence of personifications appeared in J. W. McCutchan, “Personified Abstractions as Characters in Elizabethan Drama”, diss. University of Virginia, 1949, according to which “personified abstractions continued to be familiar and popular stage personages throughout the period 1558-1616” (866).

<sup>65</sup> Some recent scholarship has been turning away from this view, but is still haunted by it. A good example is J. Watkins’ materialist take on the problem in “The Allegorical Theatre”, *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. D. Wallace (Cambridge, 1999). “The morality playwrights”, we read, “adopted allegory” – by which Watkins consistently means personification – “as their basic mode because its subordination of the particular to the universal mirrored the hierarchies of an imagined feudal polity that equated social aspiration with pride” (767). If so, one would expect the superstructure to decline along with the base, and Watkins intimates as much when he adds that “The more demographic and economic conditions allowed subordinate groups to raise their wages, improve their terms of tenantry, and heighten their overall standard of living, the more they could think of themselves as existing apart from a predetermined social structure” (768). The obvious problem here is that “allegorical” drama outlives feudalism, forcing Watkins into self-defeating formulations: early and mid-sixteenth-century plays “do not reject allegory as a mode of dramatic exposition” even as “they do reject the social conservatism that it embodies in the moralities” (775) – the very conservatism, then, that was initially used to explain the emergence of the allegorical mode. For all his explicit protests against “progressivist literary history that reduces all medieval drama to a crude anticipation of Shakespeare” – and specifically against the premise of “the triumphant recovery of the individuated character from medieval abstraction” (774) – Watkins is ultimately unable to reconceptualise the history of “allegorical” drama outside of the Burckhardtian pattern. When feudalism fails, he moves on to the next broad historical category, the Reformation, only to meet with the “allegorical” plays of Bale. The conclusion is again self-consuming: while playwrights like Bale show that the Reformation “did not put an immediate end to drama in the medieval, allegorical tradition”, it did create, “somewhat paradoxically, the opportunity for an increasingly secularized drama. Above all, the misgivings about allegory and *allegoresis* encouraged playwrights to present their characters more as exemplars than allegorical embodiments of virtues and vices. As the universal yielded to the particular, an aesthetic developed that associated abstraction not with truth but with dramaturgical *naïveté*. By the later sixteenth century, allegorical plays were more likely to figure in the repertoire of schoolboys and amateurs than in the professional and commercial theatre of Marlowe and Shakespeare” (791-2). This is perhaps not as triumphalist as in most earlier accounts, but the familiar alignments and trajectories survive largely intact.



the point where the “mixed” plays reach their peak in the 1550s and 1560s.<sup>66</sup> This may seem a tautologous observation but is in fact of great importance: what this means is that personifications largely appeared in works belonging to a particular dramatic mode, whereas their frequency and status in other types of drama was far less prominent, which further disproves their supposed prevalence in the so-called Middle Ages. In brief, the figures very strongly indicate that the period between 1400 and 1580 is in this regard a unit, and resist any attempt to superimpose upon them the Burckhardtian split between “medieval”-“allegorical” and “Renaissance”-“realist”.

The central question, then, is what prompts the precipitous decline of this tradition after about 1580, and here again the answer, or at least part of the answer, seems obvious: what these figures reflect is the emergence of commercial London theatre in the late 1570s.<sup>67</sup> If one is looking for an event that a) made a major impact on the nature of the drama, and b) happened in the late 1570s – which is what the figures indicate independently of any such thesis – then surely this is the most plausible explanation. But why would the increased professionalization and institutionalization of the popular stage entail the banishment of the personifications? Here the Burckhardtian thesis meets its final nadir, for according to this thesis the personification play should be the expression of a residual, native, and popular

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<sup>66</sup> The vogue of the “mixed” personification play – emerging in the 1540s, peaking in the 1550s, and expiring only in the 1590s, a decade later than the “pure” variety – does seem to be a specifically mid-sixteenth-century phenomenon. Possibly, then, it could be argued that the lesser advances in the popularization and commercialization of the theatre in the mid-century decades had already initiated the process of weeding out the personifications and replacing them with named human characters. In this respect it is of significance that mixed personification plays, or plays very close to meeting the 50-90% criterion, make up for the bulk of the 27-play corpus of “popular” Tudor drama up to the late 1570s, as analyzed by Bevington in *From “Mankind” to Marlowe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962): “plays homogenous in the sense that they could have been presented under no auspices except those of a commercial itinerant stage” (48). Prior to the 1530s, the plays on the list are composed either wholly of personifications, or wholly avoid them. After the 1530s, approximately 50-90% of personifications is found in twelve of the plays, three further plays contain between 19-40%, and only two contain 10% or fewer. Thus, although the overall percentage of personifications actually increases in the mid-century decades, its decline specifically in those plays legitimately designated as “popular” corresponds to the development of the partially commercial itinerant popular theatre, on which see J. Milling, “The Development of a Professional Theatre, 1540-1660”, in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. J. Milling *et al.* (Cambridge, 2004), and W. R. Streitberger, “Adult Playing Companies to 1583”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*, ed. R. Dutton (Oxford, 2011).

<sup>67</sup> Three-year period of c.1575-77 saw the opening of the first permanent private theatres (St Paul’s and the first Blackfriars), four purpose-fitted inn-playhouses (the Bel Savage, the Bull, the Cross Keys, and the Bell), and most importantly in the present context, three large, purpose-built public playhouses (the Theatre, the Curtain, and the playhouse at Newington Butts). The account of these developments has been told many times: a classic account is A. Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage*, 4th ed. (2009; repr. Cambridge, 2012); for the primary documents, see *Theatre*, ed. Wickham, Berry, and Ingram, 287-674.

medievalism, which then gives way to the imported modernity of the Renaissance, allowing the drama to emerge, at long last, from Everyman to Othello. If this were so, then the establishment of commercial theatre, with popular taste beginning to dictate dramatic production to a hitherto unprecedented extent, should see the personification play at least remain at its former level, if not further increase in popularity. What we see, however, is the exact opposite, and the simplest explanation is that this dramatic mode was never genuinely popular, and was in fact booed off the stage as soon as the paying playgoer got a say in what sort of performance their hard-earned penny would subsidize.<sup>68</sup>

It was not, then, “the rude poets of those unlettered ages” who had a taste for “compleat dramatic pieces consisting intirely of [...] personifications”.<sup>69</sup> On the contrary, this was precisely the taste of the learned, emerging from, and moulded by, exposure to literary models going back to Prudentius’ *Psychomachia*, whereas the rude and the unlettered, in this country like in any other, at this as at any other time, preferred to be entertained rather than lectured, and preferred stories and plays about persons to those about personifications. If so, the radical demise of personifications around 1580 is to be attributed to a fortunate confluence of the lowbrow and the highbrow: of the unchanged and perennial popular taste for stories about human characters, and the altered taste of the elite, which now increasingly looked to classical drama, with its sparse use of personifications, as a model. This, however, is a confluence, not causation, for it seems clear that humanism did not and could not bring about this change on its own. The literary and intellectual tendencies normally designated by this term had been present in England for over a century by 1580, yet we see no decline in the use of personifications in this period. If personifications are an essential literary and dramatic expression of the medieval mentality and medieval aesthetics, and if humanism is as hostile to this mentality and this aesthetic as has been claimed, then why do we find personifications

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<sup>68</sup> Again, it would be a mistake to automatically extend any popularity that the “morality” may have had to the use of personifications as such. This does not invalidate the claims – e.g., Dessen’s in *Shakespeare and the Late Moral Plays* (Lincoln, 1986), and elsewhere – that the *moralties* continued to have a share in the new popular stage of the late 1570s and early 1580s, or the larger claim, now endorsed by numerous scholars, that these moralities exercised an influence on later Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. The ensuing discussion of *Hamlet* points to several instances of such influence, both in specific details and broad dramatic patterns.

<sup>69</sup> Percy, *Reliques*, 1: 120.

alive and well on English stages as late as the 1570s? Furthermore, we see that even after 1580 personifications continue to play an important role in masques and other types of patronage-based performances intended for elite audiences (or those which, as is the case of some pageants and comparable occasional performances and entertainments, are open to public view, yet supported by, and primarily aimed at, their elite sponsors). Finally, as bona-fide classicists like Sidney or Jonson keenly felt, the bulk of the post-1580 popular drama was simply not classicist, and yet it did banish personifications to the point of near-extinction – to single out this one feature as the result of humanist classicism, and at the same time view others as remnants of native and popular medievalism, is implausible. At most, then, immersion in the classical drama gave the playwrights part of the means to dispense with personifications, yet both the motive and the opportunity came from the rise of a truly commercial London theatre of the late 1570s, and are thus ultimately credited to that popular taste that was the cause of such distress to “Thomas Lodge, of Lincolns Inne, Gentleman”, and others who found themselves in the same unprecedented position of tying their university-trained pens to “*Pennie-knaues delight*”.<sup>70</sup>

Discussing these problems, historians of the drama often quote the singularly revealing, yet in my view misunderstood, passage by Lodge’s friend Robert Greene, featuring a player who complains that his repertory has grown obsolete:

Nay more (quoth the Player) I can serue to make a pretie speech, for I was a countrey  
 Author, passing at a Morrall, for twas I that pende the Morrall of mans witte, the  
 Dialogue of Diues, and for seuen yeers space was absolute Interpreter to the puppets.  
 But now my Almanacke is out of date:

*The people make no estimation,  
 Of Morralls teaching education.*<sup>71</sup>

To begin with, it is not at all certain whether personifications are an essential component of what is here termed “Morrall”. Yet even if they are, all that the player says is that the genre is

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<sup>70</sup> Having successfully tried his hand at playwriting, but now courting, with his *Scillaes Metamorphosis* (London, 1589), a more refined audience, Lodge vows “To write no more, of that whence shame dooth grow/ Or tie my pen to *Pennie-knaues delight*” (C4v).

<sup>71</sup> *Greenes Groats-worth of witte* (London, 1592), E1r.

“now” obsolete (*Greenes Groats-worth* was published posthumously in 1592), and that it is obsolete because it lacks the “estimation” of “the people”. He does not say, although that is how commentators seem to have universally understood it, that the people’s estimation has *recently* shifted ground; that the moral is now disliked, whereas *formerly* it was not. Greene’s player is not as explicit about this as we might wish, yet nothing in his words is incompatible with the thesis proposed here, namely that the personifications declined not due to any rapid change in popular taste, but rather because, with the advent of popular theatre existing on a truly commercial and competitive basis – a theatre subsisting on an entry fee paid in advance of the performance by each individual playgoer, who could now also choose among a number of alternatives, with the playhouses and the companies vying among each other, and collectively with other types of entertainment, for his or her custom – the popular taste began to dictate dramatic production to a hitherto unprecedented extent.<sup>72</sup>

In short, only in a lesser degree can the rapid demise of dramatic personifications in the 1580s be regarded as a triumph of humanist over native tradition, whereas in a greater degree it should be regarded as exactly the opposite – a triumph of popular over elite taste, and of predominantly commercial over predominantly patronage-based theatre. Returning

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<sup>72</sup> A case for the genuine, grass-roots popularity of the moralities is of course mounted in Bevington’s still indispensable *From “Mankind” to Marlowe*, according to which the “morality play [...] was the dominant mode of popular dramatic expression for about a century”, and a staple genre of “a genuinely national, popular, commercial” mid-Tudor drama (4-6). Bevington’s usage of the terms “popular” and “commercial” would, however, bear scrutiny. His study aims to recover “a drama that strove through commercial presentation to win the favour of a genuinely national audience in England”, and a “popular theatre [...] that played to country as well as to town, to lower and middle classes as well as to the gentry, developing thereby a drama for many tastes and for a wide range of opinion on ethical, religious, and political questions” (8). Does the nature, and specifically the source of income, of the mid-century troupes meet these requirements? Can we describe as “commercial” a type of theatre that seems to have often relied primarily on forms of patronage, whether by the aristocrat who extended his endorsement to the troupe, or the representative of the civic authorities, who would fund their first performance when newly arrived into a town, a custom described in the well-known passage from R. Willis’ *Mount Tabor* (London, 1639), F7v: “In the City of *Gloucester* the manner is (as I think in other like corporations) that when Players of Enterludes come to towne, they first attend the Mayor to enforme him what noble-mans servants they are, and so to get licence for their publike playing; and if the Mayor like the Actors, or would shew respect to their Lord and Master, he appoints them to play their first play before himself and the Aldermen and common Counsell of the City; and that is called the Mayors play, where every one that will comes in without money, the Mayor giving the players a reward as hee thinks fit to shew respect unto them.” Note the “or” here: the mayor pays the actors even if he does not like the play, in courtesy to their noble patron. At both Oxford and Cambridge, there are records of companies being paid by the universities, presumably for this reason, yet sent away without being allowed to perform on university grounds. See *REED: Oxford*, 614, where this is said to have been a regular practice, with very few exceptions, after 1584; *REED: Cambridge*, ed. A. H. Nelson (Toronto, 1989), 984. The prohibition did not extend to the plays staged outside of the universities in the cities of Oxford and Cambridge (*REED: Oxford*, 614). Whatever such touring companies additionally made from collections, their operation can hardly be considered as fully, perhaps not even as mainly, commercial.

now to the question of the relation between the trends for personifications and personification drama and that for the non-cycle religious drama, two major points emerge: we see that the 1580s drop in dramatic personification coincides with the second and final decline of the non-cycle religious drama (from 18% to 0% in the 1580s), and that it notably fails to coincide with its first and more significant decline (from 49% to 20%, in the 1550s). If, as suggested above, this first decline is due to increased regulation of religious subject matter from the 1550s onward, then this explains why it finds no parallel in the trend for the personifications. It now further becomes clear is that second drop in the 1580s, jointly with the personifications, also reflects the emergence and rising success of the commercial London stage, and the correspondingly increased need for its regulation. That the radical reform of the Master of the Revels office, extending its jurisdiction over all theatrical performances in the land – a reform initiated by Burghley in 1573 and eventually formalized in the Patent accorded to Tilney in December 1581 – exactly parallels these developments is no coincidence.<sup>73</sup> As thousands flocked to the new playhouses, it became ever more important to control what they saw there, especially in so far as it pertained to “matters of religion or of governance of the estate of the Commonwealth”, while the theatre’s increased visibility and institutionalization made this control easier to exercise. At the same time, the growing consolidation of the Church of England’s position as a moderately Protestant *via media* between the extremes of Catholicism and Puritanism made the indiscriminate prohibition of all overt religious subject matter in the drama an additionally viable strategy for the regime to adopt.

To establish all this is of fundamental importance for the present study because it allows us to disentangle the demise of personifications and overt religious subject matter, both demonstrable empirical facts, from the supposed demise of “allegory”, a different and not as

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<sup>73</sup> Tilney’s Patent authorized him “to warn, command and appoint in all places within this our Realm of England, as well within franchises and liberties as without, all and every player or players with their play-makers either belonging to any nobleman or otherwise bearing the name or names of using the faculty of play-makers or players of Comedies, Tragedies, Enterludes, or what other shows soever from time to time and at all times to appear before him with all such plays, Tragedies, Comedies or shows as they shall have in readiness, or mean to set forth and then to present or recite before our said Servant or his sufficient deputy whom we ordain and appoint and authorise by these presents of all such shows, plays, players and playmakers, together with their playing places, to order and reform, authorise and put down, as shall be thought meet or unmet unto himself or his said deputy in that behalf” (*Theatre*, ed. Wickham, Berry, and Ingram, 71).

easily quantifiable thesis. In part this is a terminological problem: many historians of the drama have employed the term “allegory” to refer exclusively or predominantly to personification, and instead of the genus, have thus taken upon themselves the dubious and incomparably more difficult task of accounting for the entire species.<sup>74</sup> If, however, we bring a more nuanced view of allegory to bear on the evidence – a view which recognizes a variety of possible manifestations between the exoteric and esoteric extremes of the allegorical spectrum – it will be seen that the gradual transformation and decline of personification-based drama went hand in hand with the rise of a different, more esoteric mode of dramatic allegory. Characters with proper names do begin appearing alongside and eventually replace personified abstractions, yet these characters are themselves used to convey allegorical meanings.<sup>75</sup> Nominally particular settings replace the indeterminate locales of many of the moralities, yet these, even when they contain elements of “local colour”, often signal the

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Wiggins’ *Catalogue*, which includes the section “Allegorical Roles” in every entry where it is applicable, but specifies that “allegory” here means “personification”: “roles who are explicitly personified abstractions, not quasi-allegorical figures like the characters in *Midas* or *The Broken Heart*, whose allegorical significance is secondary to their non-allegorical aspect” (1: xxviii). Obviously this distinction between “allegorical” and “quasi-allegorical” characters is problematic, as is the notion of the allegorical sense being “secondary” to the “non-allegorical aspect” – in many cases, would not the opposite apply? However, the conceptual distinction is clearly made, and is methodically implemented in the *Catalogue*, making it an exceptionally useful tool for the present study. While personification can be profitably viewed as a form of allegory in those instances where the absence of an explicit identifying tag requires an interpretive effort on the reader’s or viewer’s behalf, it can also be viewed, where such a tag is present, as the exact opposite of allegory, the narrativization or dramatization the literal end product of the allegorical process. As far as the dramatic corpus is concerned, this varies from play to play, indeed from scene to scene, and of course the problem also manifests itself very differently in reading as opposed to performance, where the speech prefix typically identifies the personification in advance of its self-identification in the text, or any attempt to do so on the reader’s behalf.

<sup>75</sup> A more extensive analysis would also need to take into account the question of obvious character types, and the associated use of semantically motivated, “Cratylian” names: weavers named Bottom, ill-willed stewards named Malvolio, prostitutes named Doll Tearsheet or Mistress Quickly, and their kind. See W. N. Niva, “Significant Character Names in English Drama to 1603”, diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1959. Niva stops at 1603 not because this brings the practice of significant naming in the drama to an end, but precisely the contrary, because “After 1603 the number of plays which contain significant names increases so much that merely to record the names that occurred between 1603 and 1616 would be to double the size of this dissertation (2, n. 1). Niva also comments interestingly on the unpopularity of the personifications – they were “hardly likely to have been lastingly satisfactory to a medieval audience; the unlearned laity, at least, needed something easier to pronounce, something commoner and more meaningful to themselves” (5) – and notes an influx of significant names with the rise of humanist influence (255). An issue that Niva does not pursue at any length – although he does note that in many cases “*Avarice* merely became *Pinchfist*” (5) – is worthy of meticulous further examination: to what degree was the banishment of the personifications is made up for by this exponential increase of significant names occurring roughly at the same time? An excellent bibliographical resource on names in Shakespeare is R. Coates’ *Names in Shakespeare Online*, <http://www.informatics.sussex.ac.uk/users/schoi/Shakespeare/about.php>; the project is currently (12 January 2015) offline, presumably only temporarily.

contemporary world in general, and England in particular.<sup>76</sup> “What child is there”, Sidney protested,

that, coming to a play, and seeing *Thebes* written in great letters upon an old door,  
doth believe that it is Thebes? If then a man can arrive to that child’s age to know that  
the poets’ persons and doings are but pictures what should be, and not stories what  
have been, they will never give the lie to things not affirmatively but allegorical and  
figuratively written.<sup>77</sup>

Thus the question is not why allegorical drama declines in this period, but why one particular form of dramatic allegory, relying exclusively or primarily on a cast of personified abstractions in an unspecified setting, is replaced by another.

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<sup>76</sup> The trend is apparent already in Medwall’s *Fulgens and Lucreces*, dating from the 1490s and widely described as the first modern – secular, humanist, romantic, realist, etc. – English play, which takes its main plot and named characters from the translation of the 1428 *De vera nobilitate* by the Italian humanist B. de Montemagno; see *The declamacyon which laboureth to shewe wherein honoure sholde reste*, in *[T]he boke of Tulle of olde age*, by Cicero ([Westminster], 1481), second pagination, D5r-F8v. In the comic subplot, however, which is Medwall’s own invention, the two characters are listed simply as “A” and “B” – not personifications, yet emphatically not “particular named people” either. Furthermore, while the other, named characters are ostensibly ancient Romans, Medwall departs from his source in having them swear contemporary English oaths and keep English maids, and clearly acknowledges the transparent topical allegory of the setting. “Wherefor”, says B, “I can think these folke [i.e. the audience] wyll not spare/ After playne trouthe this matier to procede/ As the story seyth why shulde they care/ I trow here is no man of the kyn or sede/ Of either partie [i.e. of the play’s characters], for why they were bore/ In the cytie of Rome as I sayd before”; H. Medwall, *Fulgens and Lucreces* (New York, 1920), A4v. As Bevington points out, “This comic protestation, necessary only because the audience might think otherwise, preserves dramatic distance even as it establishes the link to contemporary society” (*Drama*, 51). Fast-forwarding to *Hamlet*, something of the same effect is gained by introducing the episode of the prince of Denmark being sent away to England – a skilfully interjected piece of metatheatrical humour which has the effect of confirming, rather than discouraging, the mental equation between the Denmark of the play and the England of the playgoer. The convention is laid bare with particular explicitness in the only known play co-written by Lodge and Greene, whose the main plot is based on the biblical story of Nineveh and Jonah, yet whose title is *A Looking Glasse for London and England* (London, 1594). At the end of the play, Jonah is left alone on the stage to explicitly apply the story’s moral to contemporary London. Lodge’s other surviving play also bears a title indicating a topical relevance to the plot, based on an episode in Appian’s *Roman History: The Wovnds of Ciuill War. Liuely set forth in the true Tragedies of Marius and Scilla* (London, 1594). For a discussion of the play in relation to contemporary political affairs, see A. Hadfield, “Thomas Lodge and English Republicanism”, *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 4 (2005): 89-105. This is just one of a series of parallels between Lodge and his adversary Gosson, who also found himself in London, deprived of an expected patrimony, trying to make a living with his pen; also wrote plays for the public stage and later publicly repented it; and also thought of plays, including those of his own making, in similar terms, as seen in his *Schoole of Abuse*, where he praises “The Iew & Ptolome, [...] the one representing the greedinesse of worldly chusers, and bloody minds of Usurers: The other very liuely discrybing howe seditious estates, with their owne deuises, false friendes, with their owne swoordes, & rebellious co[m]mons in their owne snares are ouerthrowne [...]. The Blacke Smiths Daughter, & Caitlins conspiracies [...]: The first containing the treachery of *Turkes*, the honourable bountye of a noble mind, & the shining of virtue in distresse: The last, because it is knowen to be a Pig of myne owne Sowe, I will speake less of it; only giuing you to vnderstand, that the whole marke which I shot at in that woorke, was too shewe the rewarde of traytors in *Caitlin*, and the necessary gouernment of learned men, in the person of *Cicero*” (C6v-7r).

<sup>77</sup> Sidney, *Defence*, 235.

Far from sending it into decline, the developments discussed above actually provided ideal, textbook conditions for the rise of dramatic allegory, and specifically of dramatic allegory dealing precisely with what the proclamations proscribed and the Master of Revels censored: religion and politics. To recognize the resulting tendencies in drama and theatre as allegorical is in part simply a matter of adjusting one's terminology, and overcoming any lingering prejudice towards a mode of expression distasteful to many modern readers and viewers, as well a mode of scholarship often abused by its less responsible practitioners. Thus to search for "topical", "political", or "satirical" content in Elizabethan and Jacobean plays is a common, if somewhat disreputable, practice, yet to designate, where applicable, these same meanings as topical, political, or satirical "allegory" would probably raise eyebrows. Although it used all these terms, and although it gave a suggestive and well-documented description of the atmosphere of incessant "allegorical lock-picking" in the Elizabethan court – "a courtly pastime amounting to a disease", encouraged by the example of a queen who possessed a "fascination for allegorical subtlety" and "suspected a never-ending commentary in most plays she saw" – Bevington's classic study was still subtitled *A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning*.<sup>78</sup> In another major twentieth-century title, Annabel Patterson criticized a predecessor for "strenuously resist[ing] the dreaded term 'allegory'", yet herself preferred to trace a "hermeneutics of censorship" at work in later sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English literature.<sup>79</sup> We lose nothing, and gain much, if we simply call this allegory. To allegorize is precisely to speak otherwise than in one would in the agora, otherwise than publicly, and what might be called the Aesopic theory of allegorical expression claims

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<sup>78</sup> In the opening paragraph, Bevington quotes from J. W. Bennett's article on "Oxford and *Endimion*", *PMLA* 57 (1942): 354-69: "Modern attempts to discover and interpret Elizabethan topical allegory have produced such absurdities at the hands of overzealous devotees, that a scholar who desires a reputation for sanity hardly ventures to touch the subject" (*Drama*, 359).

<sup>79</sup> See A. Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation* (Madison, 1984), 41, where this "hermeneutics of censorships" is defined as "an everywhere apparent and widely understood [...] system of communication in which ambiguity becomes a creative and necessary instrument, a social and cultural force of considerable consequence. On the one hand, writers complain constantly that their work is subject to unauthorized or unjust interpretation; on the other they gradually develop codes of communication, partly to protect themselves from hostile and hence dangerous readings of their work, partly in order to be able to say what they had to publicly without provoking or confronting the authorities". The predecessor is D. Connell, *Sir Philip Sidney* (Oxford, 1977), writing on Sidney's *Arcadia*: "I have used the term analogy on purpose, rather than allegory, because I would resist any implication [of] one-to-one correspondence" (109).



precisely that this manner of discourse emerges out of such circumstances as are being described here.<sup>80</sup>

In this sense, there is already much evidence for dramatic allegory out there, and much valuable scholarship on it, and the historicist turn of the late twentieth century, in spite of any shortcomings that may be legitimately criticized from this distance, has done much to restore its academic respectability. Nobody could today claim, as Richard Levin still could in his relentless, three-decade crusade of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, that any idea of secondary meanings – whether allegorical, ironic, parodic, thematic, or otherwise – and of different meanings intended for different parts of the audience, was completely and utterly alien to Shakespeare and his audience.<sup>81</sup> Although the term itself is seldom used, playwrights do refer to what are *de facto* allegorical meanings of their plays, or complain, as we have already seen with Jonson, about unintended allegorical meanings perceived by their audience.<sup>82</sup> Also of interest here are instances where we have overtly allegorical or personificational plays presented in a language we would normally associate with realism.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> See also Patterson's *Fables of Power* (Durham, N. C., 1991).

<sup>81</sup> In addition to numerous articles, see esp. R. Levin, *New Readings vs. Old Plays* (Chicago, 1979), and *Looking for an Argument* (Madison, 2003).

<sup>82</sup> In addition to the various instances discussed in the cited studies, for two less-known examples from mid-century Latin plays, see J. Foxxe, *Christus triumphans*, in *Two Latin Comedies*, ed. J. H. Smith (Ithaca, 1973), 206-7: "Would that the same Christ Triumphant might come to us all, not in the theatre but in the clouds; not in allegorical representation [sub aenigmate] but in the conspicuous majesty of the father, visible to all"; J. M. Aitken, *The Trial of George Buchanan before the Lisbon Inquisition* (London, 1939), 25, quoting Buchanan as testifying that under the figure of John the Baptist in his *Baptistes* he represented, "so far as the likeness of the material would permit, [...] the death and accusation of Thomas More and set before the eyes an image of tyranny of that time". Aitken accepts Buchanan's claim as genuine, but even it were not, as some have argued, the statement still shows that such a mode of dramatic allegory, coupling a general and more narrowly topical meaning, was perfectly feasible at the time. For an example of the term *allegory* being employed, see Bevington, *Drama*, 9.

<sup>83</sup> This too we have already found in Jonson's description of his masques as "representations" and "mirrors of a man's life" (see ch. 1, pp. 104-05). A further example is Thomas Lupton's *All for Money* (London, 1578), which is comprised largely of personified abstractions, and yet presented on its title page as "Plainly representing the manners of men and fashion in the world now-a-days". Should we not suspect the same when Shakespeare has his tenth-century prince of Denmark paraphrase Cicero, as reported by Donatus, in defining "the purpose of playing" as that of "hold[ing] as 'twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (3.2.20-4), or when he describes players as "the abstract and brief chronicles of the time" (2.2.520)? Shakespeare's works are quoted from *The Complete Works*, ed. S. Wells and G. Taylor (1988; repr. Oxford, 1998), with the exception of *Hamlet*, quoted from the Arden edition of H. Jenkins (1982; repr. Walton-on-Thames, 1997), and, for the 1603 quarto, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, ed. A. Thompson and N. Taylor (London, 2006). Donatus is the only witness for Cicero's definition of comedy as "the imitation of life, the mirror of manners, and the image of truth" (*Sources*, ed. Sidnell, 1: 79).

Finally, there is the playhouse itself. As such, a modern theatre is typically divested of any fixed and deliberate symbolic dimension, much less of definite allegorical signification; it does not, in itself, prior to any design imposed upon it, *represent* or *mean* anything in particular, but is rather a neutral and malleable medium for the production of representations and meanings of infinite variety. By contrast, many of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English stages – in themselves, in a number of key structural and symbolic properties preceding any additional design and performance – can be plausibly described as inherently allegorical. The canopy above the stage is not just the canopy above the stage: it is a pictorial and architectural representation of the “heavens”. The cellarage below the stage is not just the cellarage but also “hell”, and where technical conditions allowed, both the “heavens” and the “hell” were equipped with trapdoors through which actors and machines could emerge onto the central stage.<sup>84</sup> Situated thus between heaven and hell, the stage itself may have been

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<sup>84</sup> The evidence that the trapdoor to “hell” was used for the entrance and exit of devils, furies, and other infernal beings, and was thus commonly associated with them, is extensive. For some examples of this use and association, which is of significance for the ensuing discussion of *Hamlet*, see [R. Vennar], *The Plot of the Play, Called Englands Joy* ([London, 1602]), advertising a scene in which “three Furies, presenting Dissention, Famine, and Bloudshed, [...] are throwne downe into hell”, and another in which Elizabeth is “taken vp into Heauen, when presently appeares, a Throne of blessed soules, and beneath vnder the Stage set forth with strange fireworks, diuers blacke and damned Soules, wonderfully described in their seuerall torments”; T. Middleton, *The blacke booke* (London, 1604), a non-dramatic satire which begins with a prologue delivered by Lucifer “ascending” from below the stage, beginning: “Now is Hell landed here vpon the Earth/ When *Lucifer* in limbes of burning gold/ Ascends this dustie Theater of the world” (B1r); T. Dekker, *Newes From Hell* (London, 1606), B1v: “Hell being vnder euerie one of their Stages, the Players (if they had owed him a spight) might with a false Trappe doore haue slipt him downe, and there kept him, as a laughing stocke to al their yawning Spectators”; T. Adams, *The Deuills Banket* (London, 1614), V4v: “there is Hell vnder the Stage”; C. Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (London, 1619), the well-known woodcut on the title-page showing Mephistopheles, in his true form, half-emerged through the floor of Faustus’ study (Figure 2); T. Gage, *The Tyranny of Satan* (London, 1642), C3r: “Then you shal see sometimes over the Stage the Heavens open, great glory of Angels appearing, and one descending in a cloud. Somtimes you shall see from under the stage ascend a smoak of Fire and Brimstone, and a Devill leap up in such shape as may suffice to terrifie you.” The convention was not restricted to the purpose-built public amphitheatres. In the fourth dumb show in Norton and Sackville’s *Gorboduc* (London, 1565), performed on 18 January 1562 at Whitehall, “there came forth from vnder the Stage, as thoughe out of Hell three Furies” (C5r). Furies also emerge “from vnder the stage” in the first dumb shown in T. Hughes *et al.*, *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, in *Certaine Devises and Shewes* (London, 1587), A1r, performed at Greenwich on 8 February 1587, as does the ghost of Gorlois: “he descendeth where he first rose” (F1r) – the words relate to the ghost’s appearance in the final act of the play, where its abode is also explicitly identified as “Hell” (F4r), but is presumably also the case with its first appearance. These conventions survived the closing of the theatres and are also found in a number of Restoration plays: examples include Dryden’s *State of Innocence* (see ch. 3, n. 170); E. Settle, *The Empress of Morocco* (London, 1673), H1r: “Here a Dance is perform’d, by several infernal Spirits, who ascend from under the Stage”; W. Mountfort, *The Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* (London, 1697), B1r-2r: “Mephostopholis under the Stage. A good and bad Angels fly down. [...] A Devil rises in Thunder and Lightning.”

physically but was by no means symbolically bare: it represents the world, this world, the “middle earth”.<sup>85</sup>

However, while the symbolic dimensions of the three-tiered stage have been amply acknowledged, what has apparently gone unremarked is the extent to which this structure corresponds to that of the auditorium it faces, with its pit for the groundlings and the three tiers of galleries – and some portions in particular, such as the so-called Lords’ rooms in the tiring-house gallery, before these fell out of fashion in the 1600s, or the expensive rooms in the galleries adjacent to the stage – for the more affluent, better educated, and, at least in theory, more hermeneutically sophisticated part of the audience. Allegorical poetics is typically premised on a minimally twofold, typically threefold or fourfold, division of a work’s audience: those of the lowest capacities do not go beyond the literal sense; those of medium capacities take in the moral exemplum or allegory; those of higher capacities take in the more recondite allegorical senses, natural, theological, or topical. Furthermore, this intellectual hierarchy translated to the social hierarchy embedded in the very structure of the auditorium: what Andrew Gurr has called the “vertical sociology” of the public playhouse, “the physical affirmation of social differences which the design of these amphitheatres

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<sup>85</sup> To employ that ancient Germanic term and concept, whose English forms can be traced from the very beginnings of the language, and which Shakespeare could still use in a manner redolent, right down to its formulaic alliterative pairing, of its meaning in the beliefs and poetry of the old, pre-Christian north: “But stay”, says Sir Evans, disguised as a satyr, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, “I smell a man of middle earth” (5.5.79). The expression is common in Old and Middle English, and was still current in Shakespeare’s day and beyond, including the alliterative formula “man of middle earth” and its variations: see, e.g., *Beowulf*, l. 2995, *The “Beowulf” Manuscript*, ed. R. D. Fulk (Cambridge, Mass., 2010): “mon on middan-gearde”; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, 2nd. ed., ed. N. Davis (Oxford, 1967), l. 4.2100: “mon vpon myddelerde”; *A dyaloge of syr Thomas More* (London, 1529), V3r: “me[n] of mydle erth”; R. Brome, *The Queene and Concubine* (first performed c. 1635-40), in *Five new Playes* (London, 1659), C6v: “Woman of middle earth”. By the early eighteenth century, in the glossary to his edition of *Virgil’s Aeneis*, trans. G. Douglas, [ed. T. Ruddiman] (Edinburgh, 1710), the editor no longer understands the original meaning of the expression, but notes that it is “yet in use in the N. of S[cotland] among old people [...]. Thus they say, *There’s no man in middle erd is able to do it*”. The pre-Christian concept of a “middle earth” populated by humans, surrounded by other worlds populated by non-humans – of which a glimmer survives in Shakespeare’s scene, with fairies, a hobgoblin, and a satyr harassing a mortal – was easily adapted to the Christian cosmology: see, e.g., T. More, *The supplycacyon of soulis* ([London, 1529]), C1v, distinguishing the four worlds as “heuen”, “hell”, “purgatory”, and “mydle yerth”; *Christmas carolles* (London, [1545?]): “This voice both sharp & also [shrill?]/ Shalbe herd from heuen to h[ell]/ All mydle erthe it shall fulfyll”; W. Watson, *Decacordon* ([London], 1602), Q7v: “O monster of mankinde fitter for hell, then middle earth.”

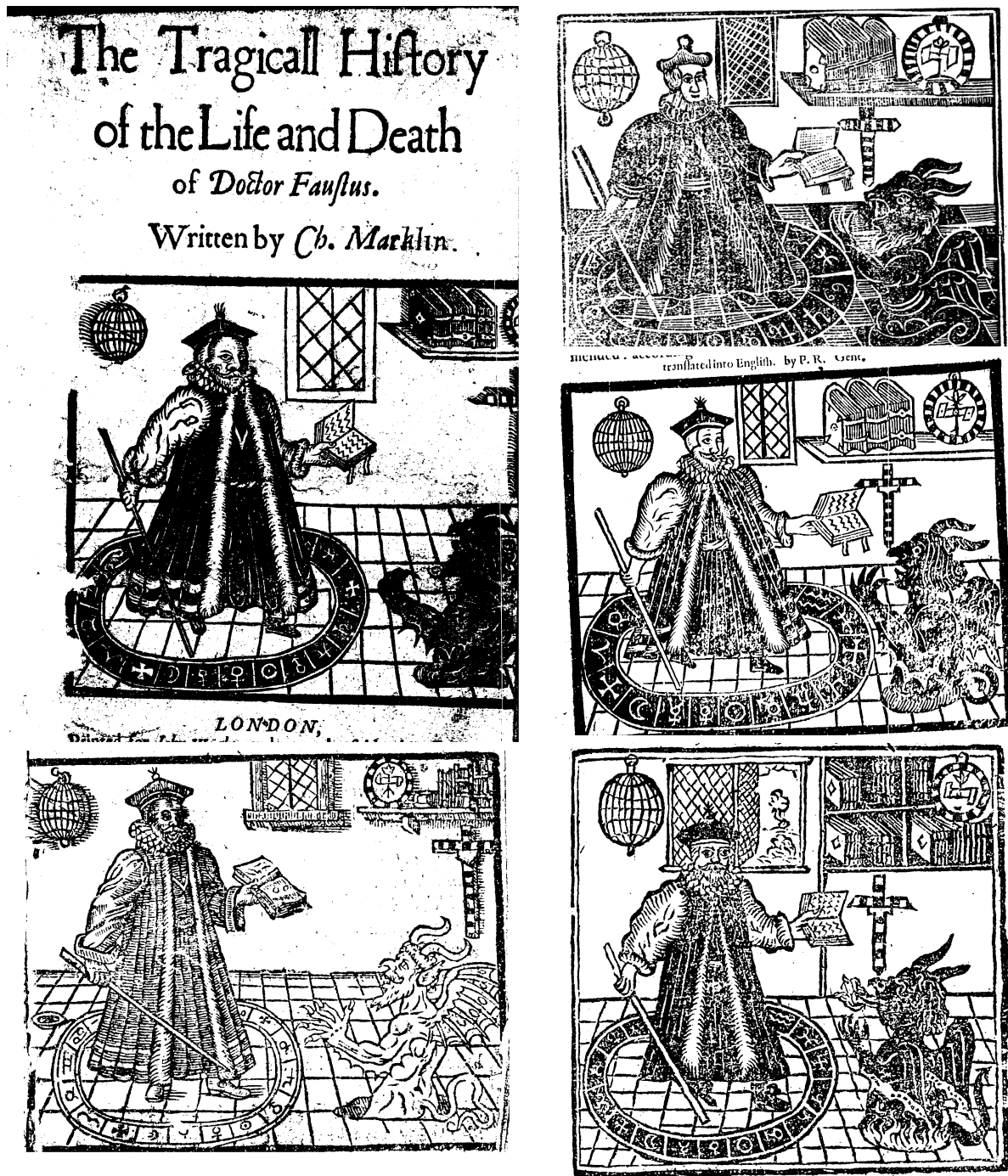


Figure 2. Faustus summoning Mephistopheles. The title page of the first edition of the B text of Marlowe's play (London, 1616), and four later versions of the woodcut: *The Just Judgment of God shew'd upon Dr. John Faustus* ([London, 1640?]); *The Historie of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus*, trans. P. R. (London, 1648); *The History of Doctor John Faustus, Compiled in Verse* (London, 1664); *The First Part of Dr. Faustus* (London, [1696?]). Cf. the note to the stage direction at 1.23.2 in C. Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. D. Bevington and E. Rasmussen (Manchester, 1993).

embodied”.<sup>86</sup> I do not mean to suggest, of course, that the tiered auditorium was deliberately constructed to reflect this poetics, yet one has to wonder whether such a structure emanated instinctively from this deeply elitist and hierarchical tendency dominant in the period’s literary and aesthetic thought. Certainly it is perfectly suited to an intellectual culture which routinely distinguished between the “vulgar” and the “wiser sort”, and between the mere reader or viewer and the “understander” – a culture in which not only the satirists of the public stages, but the public stage itself, through the mouth of Shakespeare’s prince of Denmark, can dismiss the “groundlings” as capable “for the most part of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise” (3.2.11-12).<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> A. Gurr, “Traps and Discoveries at the Globe”, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 94 (1997): 85-101, p. 88 *et passim*. As Gurr notes, the full acknowledgment of this “steeply vertical sociology” might entail a radical rethinking of the nature of performance in such venues: “Socially, in the Globe auditorium the important customers were behind and above the stage, while the lowest level was around what we think of as the front. [...] This raises such questions as whether the modern terminology, frontstage and backstage, is at all appropriate. Neither is a Shakespearean term. We know that ‘upstage’ and ‘downstage’ come from proscenium-arch days with their raked stages. But where is the ‘front’ of a circle, even one with such a vertical wall and a focal stage? The sociology of the Globe’s auditorium suggests that we should question the cinematic terminology of ‘front’ and ‘back’, ‘upstage’ and ‘downstage’, and think rather of socially up and down, inside a cylinder” (89). See also A. Gurr and M. Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare’s Theatres* (Oxford, 2000), 8-11, 33-9.

<sup>87</sup> This famous passage has perhaps not been fully understood: Hamlet is not saying that the groundlings are capable only of dumb shows as opposed to real drama. They are not capable even of all dumb shows, but only of *inexplicable* ones, and not, I think, in the common sense of *resisting* explication, but simply of lacking, unlike the elaborately allegorical dumb shows in the earlier elite drama and other types of dramatic and semi-dramatic entertainment, any matter for explication to work upon – inexplicable because there is nothing to explicate. On the shift, occurring precisely around the time of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, from the allegorical (“explicable”) to the non-allegorical (“inexplicable”) type of dumb show, see B. D. Pearn, “Dumb-Show in Elizabethan Drama”, *RES*, o.s., 44 (1935): 385-405; D. Mehl, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show* (London, 1965), 19-21. The dumb show in *Hamlet* is of course precisely such an “inexplicable” dumb-show: a mimed representation of events without a secondary signification. The terminology opposing the better or wiser to the vulgar or younger sort is omnipresent in the period’s literature and needs little exemplification here: a well-known and particularly interesting instance, in view of the ensuing discussion of *Hamlet*, is the marginal entry by G. Harvey, which mentions this play and *The Rape of Lucrece* as those of Shakespeare’s works that “haue it in them, to please the wiser sort”. For a high resolution image of Harvey’s note, and a sound argument for its earliest possible date as 1604, see M. J. Hirrel, “When Did Gabriel Harvey Write His Famous Note?”, *HLQ* 75 (2012): 291-9. For some examples of the reader-understander terminology, see *Achilles Shield* (London, 1598), prefatory note “To the vnderstander”: “You are not euey bodie, to you (as to one of my very few friends) I may be bold to vtter my mind [...]; for [...] idle capacities [are not] comprehensible of an elaborate Poeme”; A. Stafford, *Meditations, and Resolutions* (London, 1612), prefatory note “To the Vnderstander”: “Vnderstander (for, to euey Reader I write not), beholde this Booke with gentle eye”; B. Jonson, *The Alchemist* (London, 1612), prefatory note “To the Reader”, beginning: “If thou beest more, thou are an Vnderstander, and then I trust thee”; J. Taylor, *The Nipping or Snipping of Abvses* (London, 1613), prefatory “salutation to those that know how to read, and not marre the sense with hacking or mis-construction”, addressing “Thou true vnderstander”; B. Varchi, *The Blazon of Jealovsie* (London, 1615), prefatory verse “To the Ivdiciovs Vnderstander: To the Ignorant Reader: and to the base Carper whatsoeuer”; T. Middleton, *The World tost at Tennis* (London, 1620), prefatory note “To the well-wishing, -well reading Vnderstander, well-vnderstanding Reader”.

Nothing is more emblematic of this than the position accorded to the VIP sections of the galleries: the Lords' rooms, above the stage, and the first-tier rooms, adjacent to it.<sup>88</sup> Wherever comparable seats still exist today, they are normally considered the worst in the house, and are usually sold, if at all, at discounted, "restricted view" prices. Who would want to watch a play from behind the stage, not to mention who would pay several times the entry-level fee for this privilege? Yet this was precisely the custom of the most distinguished Elizabeth and Jacobean playgoers. Indeed, when the use of the Lords' rooms switched, at some point between 1602 and 1609, to a less distinguished clientele, the new fashion adopted by their former occupants placed them on even more prominent display, on the stage itself.<sup>89</sup> These features are familiar to historians of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century stage, yet their broader connotations, and especially their relevance to an inquiry into the allegorical dimensions of the period's theatre, have not been fully recognized. Once considered in this light, however, it soon becomes clear how they complement and reinforce a mode of dramatic representation that could turn any locale, from Nineveh to Elsinore, into late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century London, and any story into a vehicle for topical reference to

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<sup>88</sup> This use of the tiring-house gallery is well-attested, including the early visual representation in the de Witt drawing. Besides the standard authorities, see esp. R. Hosley, "The Gallery over the Stage in the Public Playhouse of Shakespeare's Time", *SQ* 8 (1952): 15-31.

<sup>89</sup> Two well-known passages from Dekker's works bear testimony to the change in fashion. The Lords' rooms are apparently still popular with the "gallants" in 1602, when Horace (representing Jonson) in *Satiro-mastix* (London, 1602) is urged to "forsweare to venter on the stage when your Play is ended, and to exchange curtezies, and complements with Gallants in the Lordes roomes" (M1r). By the time of *Gvls Horne-booke* (London, 1609), however, "our Gallant" is instructed to "presently aduance himselfe vp to the Throne of the Stage. I meane not into the Lords roome, (which is now but the Stages Suburbs) No, those boxes by the iniquity of custome, conspiracy of waiting-women and Gentlemen-Ushers, that there sweat together, and the couetousnes of Sharers, are contemptibly thrust into the reare, and much new Satten is there dambd by being smothered to death in darknesse. But on the very Rushes where the Commedy is to daunce, yea and vnder the state of *Cambises* himself must our fetherd *Estridge* like a peece of Ordnance be planted valiantly" (E2v). The latter passage has been commented on by numerous scholars, but I have not been able to find an adequate explanation for what is meant by "now [...] contemptibly thrust into the reare". My guess would be that Dekker is referring to a reworking of the layout of the second storey of the tiring house, whereby the front was made wholly available for acting, while the boxes were moved to the back. This would explain why these were no longer attractive to the gallants, and would fit with Chambers' observation that "most upper chamber scenes, even of the sixteenth century, are of later date than the [1596] Swan drawing", and his conjecture that "some architectural evolution [...] may have taken place"; E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (1923; repr. Oxford, 1951), 3: 95. The theory could be tested by examining whether there is a significant increase and expansion of the "above" scenes after about 1605. Interestingly, the earliest reference noted by Chambers to "point to an upper stage of substantial dimensions in the public theatres" (3: 120) is from 1608; see [T. Middleton], *The Famelie of Love* (London, 1608), B2v, where characters discuss an adult play in which they "sawe *Sampson* beare the Towne gates on his necke, from the lower to the vpper stage". The argument against the identification of the Lords' rooms with the tiring-house gallery by G. Egan, "The Situation of the 'Lords Room'", *RES* 48 (1997): 297-309, is unpersuasive on various counts.

contemporary affairs. Fiction and real life converged: if one could not watch a play without simultaneously watching the “gallants” above, beside, or indeed on the very stage – and if, moreover, as contemporary descriptions repeatedly indicate, these really maintained a level of interaction and rapport with the players even during the performance itself – then the border between play and life was far more fluid than in most modern theatre, providing an ideal setting for a topical and allegorical drama. Sitting above, beside, or on the stage makes perfect sense if the play is nominally about any number of subjects, but really about *you*: you personally, as in the famous piece of self-allegoresis by the aged Elizabeth I – “I am Richard II. know ye not that?”<sup>90</sup> – or more broadly, about your city and your fellow citizens, your country, your monarch, your church, and the larger contemporary world you inhabited.

Besides the lingering Burckhardtian conception of dramatic character, wariness of approaching the popular dramatic corpus from the point of view of allegory seems to derive largely from a failure or unwillingness to acknowledge this “vertical sociology” and hermeneutic apartheid of the popular playhouse.<sup>91</sup> If, however, we approach the problem from the point of view of allegory, it is clear how the stratified audience in the public playhouse – socially inclusive only in the most general sense of sharing, for a few hours, the same building, yet not even the same entrances and parts of the same building, to say nothing of less tangible aspects of the experience – offers textbook conditions for a form of drama that indeed did speak to everyone, only not the same thing, and not in the same way. Such a theatre, encapsulating and reproducing, in its very architecture and design, the hierarchy of the Elizabethan and Jacobean society, was in itself an allegory of this society, and the contemporary world at large – itself the Globe, as the most allegorical name to be borne by any of the period’s playhouses so suggestively puts it.

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<sup>90</sup> For a recent affirmation of the account’s authenticity, see J. Scott-Warren, “Was Elizabeth I Richard II?”, *RES*, n.s., 64 (2013): 208-30.

<sup>91</sup> This is the root of any criticism in Levin’s mode – see esp. “The Two-Audience Theory of English Renaissance Drama”, *Shakespeare Studies* 18 (1986): 251-75 – but it also appears in inverse form, for example in Clare’s argument against Patterson’s notion of a “hermeneutics of censorship”: “Although some members of the socially inclusive Elizabethan audience would have been able to decode oblique political analogies, the majority, who were not privy to court affairs or to ideological debate, would perhaps have appreciated only thinly veiled satire and topical associations. Communicating with an unhomogeneous audience, the playwright has to be more audacious than the writer” (*Censorship*, xi-xii). Here the audience is acknowledged to be heterogeneous, yet the unspoken presumption is that the playwright *wants* to be understood, and *fully* understood, by the whole or at least the majority of this heterogeneous audience.

## THAT MONSTER, CUSTOM

“No work in the English canon”, writes Margareta de Grazia,

has been so closely identified with the beginning of the modern age as *Hamlet*. The basis of this identification is so obvious now that it hardly needs to be stated. By speaking his thoughts in soliloquy, by reflecting on his own penchant for thought, by giving others cause to worry about what he is thinking, Hamlet draws attention to what is putatively going on inside him. In recognition of his psychological depth and complexity, Hamlet has been hailed as the inaugural figure of the modern period: “the Western hero of consciousness,” “[a]n icon of pure consciousness,” “a distinctly modern hero,” providing “the premier Western performance of consciousness.”<sup>92</sup>

As the epitome of precisely those aspects of modernity with which the present chapter is predominantly occupied, Shakespeare’s prince of Denmark, his longest and most iconic role, came to prominence already with the earliest exercises in Shakespearean “character criticism” in the final decades of the eighteenth century, and has retained its almost unique status into our own day. The very word *psychology*, de Grazia reminds us, enters the English language in Coleridge’s attempt to explain Shakespeare’s apparent lack of method by shifting the neoclassicist emphasis on plot and action to character and thought.<sup>93</sup> If judged by appropriately *psychological* standards – Coleridge begs “pardon for the use of this *insolens verbum*: but it is one of which our language stands in great need” – the neoclassical unity of plot can and should be replaced by the psychological unity of character, typical of Shakespeare’s work in general, and “peculiarly characteristic of Hamlet’s mind” in particular.

Because of this special status, the play presents the ideal ground on which to test the observations offered above, and to exemplify the effects of an approach which does not sever the popular drama from the wider intellectual and aesthetic currents of the period, and specifically the allegorical poetics investigated in the preceding chapter. Contrary to most readings of *Hamlet*, the remainder of this chapter will thus argue, firstly, that the play is a

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<sup>92</sup> M. de Grazia, *“Hamlet” without Hamlet* (Cambridge, 2007), 7.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.



religious and political allegory, with a marked satirical aspect, on matters of religious and political controversy (or at the very least contains a strong allusive and satirical subtext pertaining to these matters);<sup>94</sup> secondly, that the perspective governing this allusive or allegorical subtext is identifiably that of mainstream Church of England Protestantism, and that in this perspective most of the play's notoriously contentious religious and political elements seem to fall into place; and thirdly, that this reading corresponds remarkably well to some of the circumstantial evidence we have on *Hamlet*, such as the record of its performances at the universities of Cambridge and Oxford, and the nature, otherwise deeply problematic, of a number of early references and allusions to this play. While its primary aim is to thus shed light on the dynamics of allegorical representation in English drama in the early 1600s, it is also hoped that the ensuing discussion will also contribute to a fuller understanding of Shakespeare's famous, yet still imperfectly understood play.

In some respects, then, my discussion is obviously anticipated by Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory* and the ensuing "turn to religion" in Shakespearean and "early modern" studies; in others, it is intended as a critique of much of the work done under this aegis, and especially of the Catholic Shakespeare project.<sup>95</sup> If there has never been a better moment to write about

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<sup>94</sup> It is useful to compare B. Hoxby's definition of allegorical drama – as opposed to the more isolated use of an allegorical motif in a dominantly non-allegorical work – as that "whose fiction appears to point toward a system of non-fictional ideas", and in which, crucially, "the existence of such a system is suggested by the 'rudiments' of an interpretation provided in the play itself"; B. Hoxby, "Allegorical Drama", in *Companion*, ed. Copeland and Struck, 192. As I hope to show, *Hamlet* meets both these criteria.

<sup>95</sup> See S. Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, 2001); K. Jackson and A. F. Marotti, "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies", *Criticism* 46 (2004): 167-90. Subsequent contributions are too numerous to be surveyed here, including those devoted, partly or wholly, to the "Catholic Shakespeare" theory. For an account of its origins, see D. Chandler, "Catholic Shakespeare", *ELN* 44 (2006): 29-41; for a dissenting estimate some of the central "evidence" at stake, R. Bearman, "'Was William Shakespeare William Shakeshafte?'" *SQ* 53 (2002): 83-94 (Honigmann's reply in "The Shakespeare/Shakeshafte Question", *SQ* 54 [2003]: 83-6, is unpersuasive, to put it mildly: Bearman's objection to the idea of Shakespeare being left such a large annuity at seventeen years of age, and only months after having supposedly joined Hoghton's household, is countered with the argument that "'gentle Shakespeare' [...] seems to have had a remarkable talent for inspiring friendship and affection"); "John Shakespeare's 'Spiritual Testament'", *SS* 56 (2003): 184-202; "John Shakespeare", *SQ* 56 (2005): 411-33. The early critique by M. Davies, "On This Side Bardolatry", *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 58 (2000): 31-47, remains exemplary in its lucid analysis of the broader implications of the trend: the benefit of the Catholic Shakespeare theory is that its proponents get to "have [their] canonical cake and eat it: [...] Shakespeare can be said to have a particular religious identity but one which still demands that all theology, religion, and religious history are to be read as absent from the plays. As a consequence, the Catholic Shakespeare [...] becomes, finally, quite indistinguishable from the canonised, universal, and utterly religion-less Shakespeare that has been handed down to us for centuries by Coleridge, Carlyle, Bloom, *et al.*" (39). To be added is that a Catholic Shakespeare is equally attractive to those who do not wish to see Shakespeare as universal in this mainstream Bardolatric mode, but do wish to see him conform to their own ideological agendas, as an anti-establishmentarian voice of the repressed Elizabethan "other". The subtitle of H. Hammerschmidt-

religion in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature, it is also clear that the potential of much of this work remains limited by the “presentist” bias which the “turn”, at least as presented in the landmark statement by Jackson and Marroti, was originally supposed to combat.<sup>96</sup> It is thus best stated outright that my discussion proceeds on the assumption that the perspective governing the religious element in *Hamlet*, and compatible with most circumstantial evidence relating to this play, is that of mainstream Church of England Protestantism, and that I consider the competing theories, especially the Catholic Shakespeare and its avatars – the “haunted”, “hybrid”, “allusive”, “unreformed” Shakespeares of much recent scholarship – to be mistaken, at least as far as they relate to this particular work.<sup>97</sup> Also to be stressed is that I refrain, on methodological principle, from any discussion of Shakespeare’s personal religious beliefs: whether or not these coincide with the perspective emerging from the texts and contexts of *Hamlet*, what follows is an attempt to recover the latter rather than the former – the *intentio operis* rather than *auctoris*, the beliefs not of the

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Hummel’s *Die verborgene Existenz des William Shakespeare* (Freiburg, 2001), one of a series of new biographies exploiting the Catholic angle, is exemplary of this trend of presenting Shakespeare as a *Dichter und Rebell im katolischen Untergrund*. Finally, the Catholic Shakespeare project remains associated with authors with a strong confessional bias, including members of Roman Catholic clergy: among authors of recent book-length titles, such is the case with P. Milward and D. N. Beauregard.

<sup>96</sup> Jackson and Marotti position their “turn” against the “relentless ‘presentism’ in political readings of early modern culture”, whereby “The otherness of early modern religious agents and culture(s) is translated into (for us) more acceptable modern forms conformable to our own cultural assumptions” (“Turn to Religion”, 168). In this, however, they seem unaware of the degree to which their own arguments – notably the insistence that a genuine engagement with early modern religion can proceed only on the guidance of postmodernist theologians and philosophers such as Levinas, Derrida, de Vries, Badiou – can be seen as radically “presentist” in orientation. Unsurprisingly, the turn proved instantly compatible with “presentist” and “neo-Theory” arguments – witness, for example, Fernie’s *Spiritual Shakespeares*, or J. Reinhard Lupton’s “The Religious Turn (to Theory) in Shakespeare Studies”, *ELN* 44 (2006): 145-9.

<sup>97</sup> See, respectively, Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*: Shakespeare is “haunted by the spirit of his Catholic father”, and it is “conceivable that [he] felt a covert loyalty to [Catholic] structures and a dismay that they were being gutted”, yet “We do not [...] need to believe that Shakespeare was himself a secret Catholic sympathizer” (249-54); J.-C. Mayer, *Shakespeare’s Hybrid Faith* (Basingstoke, 2006): “religion for Shakespeare was not so much a matter of systematic allegiance as one of *constant* debating and questioning. [...] The problem is and has often been that the terms of this questioning among scholars have often been incomplete, one-sided or partisan, whereas the cultural and religious universe around Shakespeare was fast-moving, ever-changing and largely hybrid” (5); M. Hunt, *Shakespeare’s Religious Allusiveness* (Aldershot, 2004): “my argument discovers the surprising extent of Shakespeare’s amalgamation of Protestant and Catholic motifs and ideas in single images, concepts, and characterizations”, a “syncretistic method [...] virtually singular among early modern English playwrights” (ix); G. Woods, *Shakespeare’s Unreformed Fictions* (Oxford, 2009): “With its negative prefix, ‘unreformed’ points to the way the ‘Catholic’ material under discussion refuses the orthodox narratives of the state Church without actively promoting an alternative theological agenda. The content studied in this book has a distinctively Catholic resonance, but it does not necessarily convey theologically or politically Catholic meaning” (17).

play's real but its implied author.<sup>98</sup> That said, it is certainly remarkable that the possibility of Shakespeare's allegiance to the Church of England mainstream has not received a fraction of the attention that has gone into investigating the exceedingly unlikely possibility of his Catholicism. Indeed, besides a Roman Catholic, Shakespeare has been a Puritan (or Puritanically influenced), a Jew, a Buddhist, a sceptic, an agnostic, even an atheist, yet there is still no comprehensive argument for him as a regular – conforming (but not unthinking), convinced (but not zealous), and polemically and theologically informed (but not expert) – member of the official national religion of his day.<sup>99</sup> Such a Shakespeare, one “whose plays

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<sup>98</sup> This methodological caveat, well-acknowledged in some recent work, is of crucial importance. However reasonable it may seem, a straightforward relation between Shakespeare's personal beliefs (if any) and those emanating from his work must not be simply assumed. Lodge's Catholicism, for example, is infinitely better attested than Shakespeare's, yet Lodge and Greene's *Looking Glasse* still ends with an anti-Catholic statement more explicit than anything in Shakespeare's work, appealing to Elizabeth as “the pillar of [God's] Church,/ Against the stormes of Romish Antichrist” (I4v). So Lodge may have been a Roman Catholic, yet his play was most certainly not, and the possibility of such a discrepancy in Shakespeare's case should at least be kept in mind. It is further necessary to distinguish between the possibility of Shakespeare, or any other author, maintaining different religious beliefs at various given points in his life. Honigmann's work illustrates the issues involved: his *Shakespeare: The “Lost Years”*, rev. ed. (Manchester, 1998) is often presented as a major contribution to the Catholic Shakespeare camp, yet Honigmann's conclusions actually militate against reading Shakespeare's plays in a Catholic light. As he elsewhere summarizes his case, “My Shakespeare was probably (but by no means certainly) brought up as a Catholic, probably continued as a Catholic in his lost years, and possibly returned to his Catholic faith on his death-bed, after (probably) converting to the Church of England when or soon after he started his career in the theatre”; E. A. J. Honigmann, “Catholic Shakespeare?”, *Connotations* 12 (2002-03): 52-60, p. 54. Thus Honigmann's Shakespeare was probably *not* a Catholic precisely in the period in which he wrote his works, whereas he may have been one in periods which, while of interest to the biographer, are of secondary interest to the literary historian. Finally, while the presumption that Shakespeare's oeuvre is uniform in its religious outlook should not necessarily be discarded, neither should it be taken for granted. Cherry-picking from the plays, as P. Milward does in his *Shakespeare the Papist* (Ave Maria, 2005), “words and sentences and whole speeches pointing away from themselves to a hidden source of inspiration” (285), cannot be taken as serious scholarship, nor can the mysticism to which Milward freely confesses, noting that the passages he has assembled “prove nothing outside their dramatic contexts”, and indeed fail to prove anything “in the strict sense of proof. Yet there is a strange similarity among them, pointing beyond their immediate context to something deep in the heart of the dramatist” (19).

<sup>99</sup> See T. Carter, *Shakespeare: Puritan and Recusant* (Edinburgh, 1897), 173-98; K. Gross, *Shylock Is Shakespeare* (Chicago, 2006); J. Howe *A Buddhist's Shakespeare* (London, 1994); M. Lamonica, *Whacking Buddha* (Philadelphia, 2005); D. Cox, *Seeming Knowledge* (Waco, 2007); D. Loewenstein, “Agnostic Shakespeare?”, in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion*, ed. D. Loewenstein and M. Witmore (Cambridge, 2015); E. Mallin, *Godless Shakespeare* (London, 2007). One of the most recent contributions, appearing as this chapter was being written, is D. S. Kastan's *Will to Believe* (Oxford, 2014), which situates Shakespeare as “probably something like what Christopher Haigh has termed a ‘Parish Anglican,’ a tolerant, largely habitual Christian, who recognized the ‘communal values of village harmony and worship and objected to the divisiveness of the godly.’ Perhaps this marks him as Protestant in name only, but that was true of so many early modern Christians, even many Catholics. Haigh at least provides a plausible, if slightly anachronistic, name for what I see in the plays: an inclusive and theologically minimalist Christianity that resisted religious rigor and valued social accord. I like the term, though more on the grounds of its social identification than its confessional one. In emphasizing the ‘parish’ rather than the church, [...] ‘parish Anglican’ gives voice to a wider frame of social engagement, which seems to me characteristic of Shakespeare, and indeed more so than any sectarian commitment. He seems to me at once too skeptical and too sympathetic to be zealously committed to any confession” (37) This is certainly closer to any view I would endorse, yet the idea of the “parish Anglican”, with his “communal values of village harmony”, sounds out of place when related to a man who spent the most active

could [...] be read as reflecting, evincing, and dramatising Elizabethan Protestantism”, would be “historically specific and canonically subversive in a way that the Catholic Shakespeare simply is not. But for this reason alone, quite unsurprisingly, critics have traditionally found the idea of a Protestant Shakespeare largely unthinkable, if not utterly abhorrent – and one might suspect that this will remain the case for quite some time”.<sup>100</sup> Davies’ prediction has proven correct: fifteen years after his article, the idea would seem to remain largely unthinkable, and the present chapter seeks to contribute, however modestly, to the reversal of this disappointing trend.

That said, one does not have to agree with the broader arguments offered by many of the recent studies on the subject to benefit from the scholarship that underlies them, or to acknowledge that even these arguments are a drastic improvement over the secularist orthodoxy of a previous day. On the other hand, I am also indebted to John Corbin, Arthur McGee, Linda Kay Hoff, and other unsung heroes and heroines of the eccentric, disturbing, devil-ridden, and needless to say, largely ignored underground of *Hamlet* criticism.<sup>101</sup> In acknowledging this work, I do not wish to gloss over its shortcomings: much of it is demonstrably wrong, and some is worse than wrong, indulging in speculation that flaunts even the minimal norms of scholarly argumentation. Yet although *Hamlet* is not the savage anti-Catholic farce envisaged by McGee, any more than it is the allegorical labyrinth conjured up by the hermeneutic *horror vacui* of Kay Hoff, there is still much valuable insight in these works, and they deserve credit for their attempts to snatch the play from the vicious jaws of “That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat” (3.4.164). As a final caveat, I would like to stress that my focus here is even narrower than *Hamlet* itself: the ensuing discussion, dealing largely with passages of interest in the broader purview of this study, and the first act in

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portion of his life in the greatest metropolis of his day, who performed for two monarchs, had associations with members of the nobility and himself laboured to acquire aristocratic status, and who, while possessing no technical expertise in theology, must have had an above-average grip of the theological and political issues and controversies of the day. The latter is to be particularly emphasized: the presence of such sophisticated theological and political allusions as are undisputedly found in *Hamlet* must have come from somewhere. It is one thing to claim that Shakespeare was not a religious zealot – that much seems clear, and has never been seriously doubted – but that does not mean that his plays, or at least some of them, were “not written [...] to promote some polemical position in the fractious world of post-Reformation England” (4).

<sup>100</sup> Davies, “Bardolatry”, 39.

<sup>101</sup> See J. Corbin, *The Elizabethan Hamlet* (London, 1895); A. McGee, *The Elizabethan Hamlet* (Ithaca, 1987); L. Kay Hoff, *Hamlet’s Choice* (Lewiston, 1988).

particular, does not attempt a comprehensive interpretation of the play, although it does seek to indicate an intellectual and polemical context from which such an interpretation could emerge. Even so, many of the arguments will undoubtedly be found controversial, so it seems useful to first briefly review the current critical orthodoxy, identifying the issues I seek to address – issues which, as I aim to show, are largely caused by the failure to acknowledge the play’s dual, allegorical mode of representation.

This orthodoxy can in fact be traced very precisely to a few pages in T. A. Spalding’s 1880 *Elizabethan Demonology*, the first study to take a look at Shakespeare’s work through the lens of the age’s largely forgotten lore on such things as devils, witches, fairies, and most importantly, ghosts.<sup>102</sup> Reading through such materials, Spalding came upon two works – John Hooper’s 1550 *Declaration of the x holye commaundementes*, and the 1597 *Daemonologie* of James VI/I – in which he encountered the educated Protestant view of the subject, according to which there was no such thing as ghosts. In the words of Shakespeare’s future king and patron, those so-called “spirites” that sometimes appear to people “in the shaddow of a person newlie dead”, professing to “discouer vnto them, the will of the defunct, or what was the way of his slaughter”, are really disguises assumed by the devil, for “neither can the spirite of the defunct returne to his friend, or yet an Angell vse such formes”.<sup>103</sup> Hooper and James make for a very limited but perfectly representative sample of the Protestant position: eliminating the option of purgatory and thereby the theological rationale for ghost beliefs that it provided in pre-Reformation times, any genuinely supernatural apparition – i.e. not a man-made illusion or a hallucination – could now only be an angel or, far more likely, a devil.

A number of passages in Shakespeare’s plays now appeared in a wholly different light. It made sense, for example, that Brutus, faced with the supposed “ghost” of Julius

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<sup>102</sup> See T. A. Spalding, *Elizabethan Demonology* (London, 1880), 53-61. A year earlier, Halliwell-Phillipps cited another representative statement of the Protestant view from A. Willet’s 1608 *Hexapla in Exodum*, according to which “the diuels doe counterfeit the spirits and soules of the dead; by this means the diuell more strongly deceiveth, seeing men are readie to heare their parents and friends departed”; J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps, *Memoranda on the Tragedy of Hamlet* (London, 1879), 9. This is the earliest instance of the Protestant demonological view applied to the play that I have been able to find.

<sup>103</sup> James VI/I, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh, 1597), 12v-3r.

Caesar, asks, “Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil” (4.2.330). It made sense that Macbeth, faced with the supposed “ghost” of Banquo, implores it to “Approach [...] like the ruggèd Russian bear,/ The armed rhinoceros, or th’Hyrcan tiger;/ Take any shape but that” (3.5.99-101). It made sense that upon seeing Prospero, whom he believes to be long dead, Sebastian thinks that “The devil speaks in him!” (5.1.131). But above all, it made sense for the prince of Denmark to suspect that

The spirit that I have seen  
May be a devil, and the devil hath power  
T’assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps,  
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
As he is very potent with such spirits,  
Abuses me to damn me. (2.2.594-99)

None of this had made much sense before. When not explained away – as was often the case with this last passage ever since Bradley dismissed it as yet another “unconscious fiction” on Hamlet’s part, “an excuse for his delay” – the “ghost” material was simply ignored, or even recommended for excision.<sup>104</sup> Now, however, read against the contemporary demonological background, the ghost scenes made perfect sense.

Except, of course, they made no sense whatsoever. Was it to be seriously considered that the ghost of the late king Hamlet was a devil in disguise, tempting the prince into eternal damnation? And if so, what was to become of Shakespeare’s most famous play? As an early follower in Spalding’s footsteps put it, “To have represented the ghost of the dead king as the devil, or as anything but ‘an honest ghost,’ would have brought the whole play toppling down like a pack of cards”.<sup>105</sup> Thus as soon as it was recovered, it was imperative that the demonological perspective be contained, and even as he brought the demonological evidence to light, Spalding did an even better job of minimizing its impact on the traditional view of the play. In brief, it is not that the demonological perspective is, in itself, wrong – it is, rather,

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<sup>104</sup> A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* [1904], 2nd ed. (1905; repr. 1912), 131.

<sup>105</sup> F. W. Moorman, “The Pre-Shakespearean Ghost”, “Shakespeare’s Ghosts”, *MLR* 1 (1906): 85-95, 192-201, p. 199.

irrelevant. Granted, the “reforming divines distinctly denied the possibility” of ghosts, yet the belief “was too deeply rooted in the popular mind to be extirpated, or even greatly affected, by a dogmatic declaration. The masses went on believing as they had always believed, and as their fathers had believed before them, in spite of the Reformers, and to their no little discontent”.<sup>106</sup> Thus by Shakespeare’s day, there were basically three schools of thought, those of official Catholic and Protestant doctrine, and suspended between them the precarious position of the “plain man”: “In the midst of this disagreement of doctors it was difficult for a plain man to come to a definite conclusion upon the question; and, in consequence, all who were not content with quiet dogmatism were in a state of utter uncertainty”.<sup>107</sup> Finally, and crucially, of the three positions it is the plain man’s that is really relevant, as it was “probably the position in which most thoughtful men found themselves; and it is accurately reflected in [...] Shakspeare’s plays”.<sup>108</sup>

Here lie the origins of an argument that remains fundamental to most readings of *Hamlet*, and it is of interest to note at this point, in view of my further arguments below, that these readings have always relied on a radically “revisionist” view of the English Reformation and the religious beliefs of Shakespeare and/or his original audiences.<sup>109</sup> This is even more

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<sup>106</sup> *Demonology*, 54.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> I point this out in contrast to what seems to be the accepted view, namely that the recent readings of the religious element in the work of Shakespeare and his contemporaries have emerged from the influence of the revisionist history of the English Reformation by such scholars as C. Haigh or E. Duffy. Duffy, for example, has himself described *Hamlet in Purgatory* as his own ideas being “taken up in literary terms and taken for a walk”; E. Duffy, “The English Reformation after Revisionism”, *RQ* 59 (2006): 720-8, p. 721. The truth is that this influence only reaffirmed what had already been a fundamental tenet of mainstream *Hamlet* criticism for many decades. In fact, the current critical orthodoxy may turn out to owe more to the revisionism of the early “Catholic Shakespeare” evangelist R. Simpson, who may have been an influence on Spalding. See esp. the opening paragraphs of the first of Simpson’s *Rambler* articles – “Was Shakespeare a Catholic?”, *The Rambler* 2 (1854): 19-36 – which present Shakespeare as “a popular poet” and “an idol of the people”, and describe, more than a century before Haigh and Duffy, the England of Shakespeare’s day as only nominally Protestant: “it had only just become so even by law; and in fact and spirit it was scarcely so: it was in a state of transition and struggle [cf. Spalding’s ‘era of change’, p. 29]; and the struggle lasted more or less from the Reformation to the Revolution” (19). The trail of echoes suggests that Spalding was in turn an influence on further “Catholic Shakespeare” polemicists like Egan, according to whom “It did not surprise the English of the beginning of the seventeenth century that the murdered King should come from the state of purgation in which many Englishmen still believed. It is impossible to kill the vital beliefs of a nation by mere edicts; M. F. Egan, *The Ghost in “Hamlet”* (Chicago, 1906), 18; cf. Spalding in the passage cited above. In turn, Egan’s influence is detectable in the work of Milward, according to whom “the mere fact of statutes being passed in Parliament [cf. Egan’s ‘mere edicts’] did not mean that they immediately won general acceptance from the people”; P. Milward, *Shakespeare’s Religious Background* (Bloomington, 1973), 17.

explicit, and was on prominent display throughout the twentieth century in one of the major classics of Shakespearean criticism, J. Dover Wilson's *What Happens in "Hamlet"*, first published in 1935 and still in print.<sup>110</sup> By Wilson's day, further sources and parallels had been identified, the denominational divide had emerged in its full relief, and the ineffable mystery of Shakespeare's own religious beliefs, implicit in Spalding's silence on the issue, had been explicitly maintained.<sup>111</sup> In essentials, however, Wilson's treatment of the subject is an exact reproduction of Spalding's, and if we now fast-forward to the most influential contemporary study of the play, the same can be said, in the final analysis, for Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory*, and for most of the work which has followed in its train.<sup>112</sup>

Like Spalding, Greenblatt accepts the internal coherence, but not the applicability, of the demonological argument. The problem with the "heavy hints" that present the apparition as purgatorial ghost is that such a ghost is "utterly incompatible with a Senecan call for vengeance", a call which "could come only from the place in the afterlife where Seneca's ghosts reside: Hell".<sup>113</sup> Only two pages further, however, the reader is emphatically discouraged from participating in any "ingenious attempts to determine whether the apparition [...] comes from Purgatory or from Hell", questions "almost certainly doomed to inconclusiveness".<sup>114</sup> The play contains "a bewildering array of hints" about its identity, including those compatible with the demonological perspective, but it deliberately leaves

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<sup>110</sup> Wilson is certainly entitled to the dubious honour of canonizing Spalding's argument, although he has sometimes been erroneously credited with originating it: for example, by P. N. Siegel, "'Hamlet, Revenge!'", *SS* 45 (1992): 15-26, or more recently, M. W. Hunt, *Looking for Hamlet* (New York, 2007), 145-9.

<sup>111</sup> In addition to Moorman and Egan, studies preceding Wilson's edition of Lavater include E. E. Stoll, "The Objectivity of the Ghosts in Shakspeare", *PMLA* 22 (1907): 201-33; G. Craig, "The Ghosts in the Tragedies of Shakespeare", *The Mask* 3 (1910): 61-6; E. Wiley, "A Study of the Supernatural in Three Plays of Shakespeare", *University of California Chronicle* 15 (1913): 490-539.

<sup>112</sup> See J. D. Wilson, *What Happens in "Hamlet"* [1935], 3rd ed. (1951; repr. Cambridge, 1960), 56: "The Ghost in *Hamlet* comes, not from a mythical Tartarus, but from the place of departed spirits in which post-medieval England, despite a veneer of Protestantism, still believed in the sixteenth century." Consequently, "Catholics would accept [the ghost] as a matter of course; obdurate Protestants would refuse to admit him anything but a devil even after the play scene had confirmed the truth of his story: and most would stand in doubt between the two, shaking their heads [...]. As to Shakespeare's own attitude, that was, as ever, his secret" (84-5). Cf. Egan (n. 109), and Moorman: "When confronted with the catholic and the protestant doctrine as to ghosts, Shakespeare at once chooses the former – a choice which in no sense proves him to have been a catholic" ("Shakespeare's Ghosts", 199). Wilson's view of the ghost first appeared in the introduction to his edition of the English translation of Lavater's *Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Nyght*, ed. J. D. Wilson and M. Yardley (Oxford, 1929).

<sup>113</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 236-7.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.



them unresolved. And not only this play: “None of Shakespeare’s ghosts (or even the illusions of ghosts) is a demon, disguised as the wandering soul of the departed; none is a purgatorial spirit, begging for suffrages from the living. They do not greatly resemble the ghosts depicted in ballads or in public inquiries into popular superstitions, nor do they conspicuously come from a classical Hades”.<sup>115</sup> Nor is Shakespeare’s position that of a stalwart sceptic like Reginald Scot. Rather, his attitude towards this “whole, weird, tangled cultural inheritance, the mingling of folk beliefs, classical mythology, and Catholic doctrine” is “contradictory, slippery, and complex”, one of “skepticism and bafflement, not unmixed with an odd current of half-belief”.<sup>116</sup> In other words, it remains, “as ever”, a mystery – even to Shakespeare himself, as well as to the decisive majority of his audience. Greenblatt is careful not to get involved in the ungrateful business of carving up the spectrum of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century religiosity into essentialist, mutually exclusive categories, yet tell-tale details show that such categories still underlie the argument.<sup>117</sup> In sum, the Reformation “did not destroy the longings and fears that Catholic doctrine had focused and exploited”, and “throughout the reigns of Elizabeth and James [...] the boundary between the living and the dead was not so decisively closed”.<sup>118</sup>

The problem with such arguments is that they fail to make essential social and cultural qualifications. Most of the evidence cited for the survival of ghost beliefs in the period would seem to originate relatively far from London and/or relatively low on the social and intellectual ladder. At least by the 1590s, such beliefs seem to be increasingly attributed to

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>117</sup> Thus, for example, it is only the “*Pious Catholics and Protestants*” who would view stage ghosts through demonological binoculars, implying an unnamed, “impious” majority which is palpably that of the head-shaking plain men of Spalding and Wilson (ibid., 163, emphasis mine). Cf. Dover Wilson’s “obdurate Protestants”, or Bettridge and Walker’s “zealots, protestant and catholic” vs. “the rest of the populace”, in passages quoted above. The head-shaking plain man remains an essential component of the critical orthodoxy. For a further example, see A. F. Marotti, “Shakespeare and Catholicism”, in *Theatre and Religion*, ed. R. Dutton, A. Findlay, and R. Wilson (Manchester, 2003), 219: “in Shakespeare’s time, there was a great muddled middle in English Christianity, a broad terrain occupied by ‘church papists’ and by what Christopher Haigh has called ‘parish Anglicans’, the mass of culturally conservative Christians in which rigorist reformist doctrine and practice only took slowly”.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 245. Here again, Greenblatt nominally concedes that “it is extremely difficult to gauge the extent of residual belief in Purgatory among the great mass of English men and women at the century’s end”, but that does not prevent him in gauging, and in quite precise chronological terms, postulating a “fifty-year effect” whereby “the revolutionary generation that made the decisive break with the past is all dying out and the survivors hear only hypocrisy in the sermons and look back with longing at the world they have lost” (244-8).

“the unskilled multitude”, “the common people”, “many ignorant persons among us”, “poore simple and ignoraunt person[s]”, “the people rude”, “simple beholders”, and so forth.<sup>119</sup> Thus to say, without further qualification, that ghost beliefs persisted in spite of Reformation teaching is misleading. A comparison of two ghost sightings, one from the mid-sixteenth and the other from the early seventeenth century, is instructive. The first will be familiar to Shakespeareans, as it was the only piece of evidence which Spalding listed in support of his “revisionist” thesis, and has been parroted unreflectively ever since. In 1564, James Pilkington, the first Protestant bishop of Durham, writes of events that had occurred in the nearby village of Blackburn, where several people claimed to have seen the ghost of their long-dead neighbour: “These things be so common here”, the bishop complains, “that none in the authority will gainsay it, but rather believe and confirm it, that everybody believes it.”<sup>120</sup> This undoubtedly tells us something about the beliefs of the inhabitants of a village near Durham in 1564. What, if anything, it tells us about the beliefs and convictions of Shakespeare or the attested audiences of *Hamlet* in the early 1600s is unclear, to say the least, especially if Pilkington’s report is compared to the haunting, sometime between 1613 and 1617, of Hidnam House, the estate of Sir Thomas Wise on the Cornwall-Devon border.<sup>121</sup>

One night, “a little after midnight”, Wise is awoken by “a fearfull crye and shrieking of some of his maids”, who claim that they were “frighted by a walking spirit [...] in the likenes of a woman in her smock, holding her hands ouer the children”. Wise initially reacts precisely like Horatio upon being first told of the “thing” appearing on the ramparts of Elsinore: “To this conceit of their’s he gave little credit for ye præsent, and imputed it to sore

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<sup>119</sup> See P. Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2002), 246-7, for the first four quotes; R. Wilson, *The three Lordes and three Ladies of London* (London, 1590), I3r: “His Ghost may walke to mocke the people rude:/ Ghostes are but shadowes, and doe sense delude”; J. Kings, *Lectvres vpon Ionas* (Oxford, 1597), G7r: “the com[m]o[n] people deemeth, that the spirits & ghosts of the dead walk at their graues & reliques”; H. Clapham, *Three Partes of Salomon his Song of Songs, expounded* (London, 1603), I3v: “That Friar Bartholomew teacheth, how by certaine artificall glasses, there might be caused abroad very shapes of bodies, which simple beholders would imagine to be ghostes or spirits”.

<sup>120</sup> *Correspondence of Matthew Parker*, ed. J. Bruce and T. T. Perowne (Cambridge, 1853), 222; cf. Spalding, *Demonology*, 54. This remains the single piece of historical evidence in favour of the ambiguous “ghost” in R. M. Frye’s *Renaissance “Hamlet”* (Princeton, 1984), 17-18.

<sup>121</sup> The account comes from a letter by the eminent Church of England divine D. Featley to G. Abbot, archbishop of Canterbury, preserved by A. Wood and first printed in *Athenæ Oxonienses*, ed. P. Bliss (London, 1813-20), 3: 166-8. The letter is undated but must have been written during Featley’s years in Cornwall; see A. Hunt, “Featley [Fairclough], Daniel (1582-1545)”, *ODNB*.

distemper or vaine fancy of womanly feare, because, as he seriously protested, he was euer of the opinion that there were no such apparitions.” The following night, however, the apparition returns to haunt Wise himself, and again his reaction is strikingly similar to Horatio’s.<sup>122</sup> The next day, Wise seeks the advice of “Mr. Archd[eacon]”, who is of the opinion that it was “an angelical apparition and not a diabolicall illusion”. About a month later, however, he discusses the event with Featley, who disagrees, judging the apparition to be “an evill spirit”. Thus the story “opens for us a range of perspectives on the same events: those of the terrified servants, of the educated Protestant layman, [...] and of the learned divines he consults about the affair”.<sup>123</sup> What is striking here, however, is that, unlike the maids, Wise and the two divines never even entertain the possibility of an actual ghost, and are in this representative of the mainstream Protestant discourse at the time when Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*: yes, ghosts are still believed in, namely by country folk, and/or the poor and uneducated, and/or Papists, and/or women, and/or lunatics.<sup>124</sup>

To believe that Shakespeare wrote for all of them is ideologically comforting, and of course true in the sense that the popular playhouse typified by the Globe – which, however, is only one of several venues and performance contexts attested for this play – was open to a wide-cross section of contemporary society. Therefore it is probably reasonable to presume a degree of variety in the actual, empirical responses to the Elsinore apparition: we can perhaps imagine Wise’s maids attending a performance and taking it for a genuine ghost, Wise himself unsure what to make of it, the archdeacon believing it to be angel, and Featley the devil. In this sense the “ghost” of old Hamlet indeed is potentially ambiguous, but of course

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<sup>122</sup> “[H]e prayed [...] with more zeale and feruency then euer in his life, and besought so to strengthen him that he might speake to it. And as it drew nerer, he demanded of it wherefore it came? The spirit returned no answere, but came close to the bed’s feete wherevpon he rose vp in his bed, and aft[er] a zealous prayer, with confession of his heinous and grieuous sins, charged it, in the name of the God of heuen to come no nerer. After which adiuration, it stood still at his bed feete for about halfe an houre; on the end grew dim[m]er and dim[m]er, till it quite vanished out of sight. And as it vanished the day appeared.”

<sup>123</sup> Marshall, *Beliefs*, 252. Even a Catholic country gentleman – one N. Roscarrock of Newlyn East, Cornwall, who reports, around 1580, the story of the ghost of “a gentlewoman named Mistress Burlace”, who had taken four large stones from the local chapel yard, used for displaying local saints’ relics, and used them to make a cheese press – wondered whether the apparition really was the soul of the deceased or “some thing assuming her personage” (ibid., 244-5).

<sup>124</sup> Cf. ibid., 250: “It was a cliché of both English and Continental commentators those most likely to believe they had seen a ghost included the guilt-ridden, the sick, the aged, children, women (especially menstruating women), melancholics, madmen, cowards.”

this is not the sense which the post-Spalding orthodoxy has in mind, and here, finally, we arrive at the crux of this debate. While acknowledging a degree of empirical variability in actual interpretations, the orthodoxy claims to have established the one perspective which makes the best sense out of the textual and extra-textual evidence at hand, and furthermore, that this “implied reader” it has constructed was matched by the majority of the actual contemporary responses to the play. This perspective is of *intentional* ambiguity, “a deliberate forcing together of radically incompatible accounts of almost everything that matters in *Hamlet*”.<sup>125</sup> The problem is solved by proclaiming it intentionally unsolvable. To quote Greenblatt again,

the problem is that the father’s design is vengeance; vengeance, moreover, demanded by a spirit that seems to come from the place that was for Protestants a supreme emblem of the corruption of the Catholic Church. What can be made of this? The point surely is not to settle issues that Shakespeare has clearly gone out of his way to unsettle or render ambiguous.<sup>126</sup>

*Ambiguous* – the magic wand of *Hamlet* criticism, at whose touch even the play’s most contentious and uncooperative cruces vanish into thin air. Yet is it not ironic, and perhaps alarming, that this supposed ambiguity has become – “surely”, “clearly” – the only unambiguous thing about this play?

But what if we presume that Shakespeare wrote this play with more than one implied reader in mind – a presumption which of course lies at the basis of all allegorical composition, and which, as discussed above, was clearly operative in at least some of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama? What if problems which must otherwise seem unsolvable turn out to be solvable after all, just not by everyone? The implications of this are of course unpleasant to those who would like to see Shakespeare as a playwright of the people, which he of course was, in part. Yet he was also the queen’s and the king’s playwright, the playwright of the more affluent and better educated patrons of the Lords’ rooms, the hall playhouses, and private performances at aristocratic households, and perhaps even, in the case of this

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<sup>125</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 240.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

particular play, the playwright of the theologically informed audiences of the universities. He was all this, and if by acknowledging it we destroy the tragedy, it is not Shakespeare's tragedy that we destroy. Fortunately, however, we destroy nothing. Like any other allegory, the play was intended to be read on several levels, and can still be read in the classic tragic mode by those who are content with ignoring the comprehensive and subtly executed allegorical counterpoint, and who thus willingly take on the role of "mere" viewers and readers, as many of the period's authors would have seen them. For the "understanders", however, who do respond to the signals pointing to a subtext dealing with matters of religious and political controversy, there begins to emerge a play that has remained obscure, even under the undying spotlight that shines on Shakespeare's prince of Denmark, for four hundred years: a tragicomic synthesis richer and stranger than anything envisioned by the Romantic orthodoxy and its various makeovers, a *Hamlet* that has so far been fully appreciated perhaps only by the denizens of Borges' Tlön, by whom, of course, "A book that does not contain its counter-book is considered incomplete".<sup>127</sup>

## HAMLET IN HELL

That the so-called ghost is the "linchpin of *Hamlet*" is one of the few points of consensus among the competing critical factions; what kind of a linchpin it is, however, has been a subject of extensive and ongoing debate.<sup>128</sup> As discussed above, the traditional reading of the play depends crucially on the view of the ghost as intentionally ambiguous, and in this section I will argue that such a view is untenable, and that the Elsinore apparition, however empirically ambiguous it may have been in any given performance context, is meant to be understood as a demonic illusion, imbued with strong anti-Catholic satirical aspect. There have been five alternatives to the ambiguous ghost: the demonologically uninflected ghost of literary tradition, the demonologically uninflected ghost of popular tradition, the hallucinatory ghost, the genuine purgatorial ghost, and the devil. The demonological indifference of the

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<sup>127</sup> "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", in *Collected Fictions* (New York, 1998), 77.

<sup>128</sup> Wilson, *What Happens in "Hamlet"*, 52.

apparition – which is not the same, of course, as intentional demonological ambiguity – was the unquestioned assumption of most criticism up to Spalding, but has obviously been the least compelling option since. The best argument for a purely literary ghost remains that of Battenhouse, according to whom the ghost comes not from the purgatory of Roman Catholic doctrine, but “one of several regions popularly confused with it in the Renaissance – the purgatory of the Ancients, or their hell, or their vague afterworld, *hades*”, “an afterworld exactly suited to fascinate the imagination and understanding of the humanist intellectual of the Renaissance”.<sup>129</sup> This, however, requires a drastic suppression of the religious element in the play, and more generally, a long-outdated notion of an essentially pagan Renaissance.<sup>130</sup> The ghost of popular tradition meets with similar objections. Nobody disputes the presence of popular beliefs in the representation of the Elsinore apparition, and Catherine Belsey’s recent article substantially deepens our appreciation of these, but as Belsey herself makes clear, the popular background, however important, is only one of a “range of existing conventions” on which Shakespeare drew.<sup>131</sup> The hallucinatory ghost, first proposed by Heinrich von Struve in 1873, and more elaborately, and infamously, by Greg in 1917, has long been put to rest.<sup>132</sup>

The fourth alternative, a genuine purgatorial ghost, found a handful of advocates in the mid-twentieth century, all marked with a strong confessional bias, and is resurrected in an extensive recent essay by Kelly.<sup>133</sup> In its most sophisticated form, the argument is that the apparition indeed is the soul of the late king of Denmark, temporarily released from purgatory by special dispensation, and that the task it imposes on Hamlet is not the damnable sin of

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<sup>129</sup> R. W. Battenhouse, “The Ghost in *Hamlet*”, *SP* 48 (1951): 161-92, pp. 190-2.

<sup>130</sup> More specifically, the argument hangs on what is what an obviously unwarranted dismissal of the apparition’s mention of the Catholic sacraments – “Unhousel’d, disappointed, unanel’d” (1.5.77) – as “an isolated gobblet of sacramental language” in a play otherwise “devoid of the Christian world-view” (*ibid.*, 162). Battenhouse himself discards this view in his *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Bloomington, 1969), 239, n. 58.

<sup>131</sup> C. Belsey, “Shakespeare’s Sad Tale for Winter”, *SQ* 61 (2010): 1-27, p. 3.

<sup>132</sup> W. W. Greg, “Hamlet’s Hallucination”, *MLR* 12 (1917): 393-421, p. 401, n. 2.

<sup>133</sup> H. A. Kelly, “Common and Special Purgatories”, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 3rd s., 9 (2013): 255-395. For early comments on the “ghost” as purgatorial, see Chandler, “Catholic Shakespeare”. Apparently the theory was first comprehensively argued by S. A. Blackmore, *The Riddles of Hamlet* (Boston, 1917), 13-9, followed by R. Simpson and H. S. Bowden, *The Religion of Shakespeare* (London, 1899), 297-300; I. J. Semper, *Hamlet without Tears* (Dubuque, 1946), and “The Ghost in *Hamlet*”, *The Month*, n.s., 9 (1953): 222-34; M. Joseph, “Discerning the Ghost in *Hamlet*”, *PMLA* 76 (1961): 493-502, and “*Hamlet*, a Christian Tragedy”, *SP* 59 (1962): 119-40; C. Devlin, *Hamlet’s Divinity* (London, 1963). Kelly fails to acknowledge a single one of these critics, even though most of his arguments and examples have either already appeared in their work, or are directly anticipated by it.

personal blood revenge but rather the exaction of divine justice for a crime not punishable by conventional means. The chief objections to this view remain substantially the same as half a century ago: the weakness of the textual evidence – while there are several indisputable allusions to purgatory in the play, none of these is indisputably *affirmative* of the doctrine – and the lack of a single genuinely relevant parallel, of whatever kind and from whatever period, to the case we supposedly have in *Hamlet*.<sup>134</sup>

There remains the devil. This interpretation was first proposed by Hermann Ulrici in 1839, and has met with least acceptance of the four.<sup>135</sup> The problem here is not with the evidence, which is abundant, but in the feeling that this reading ruins the play. Yet going by the demonologies, the apparition haunting the ramparts of Elsinore is a blatant, open-and-shut case of demonic visitation, and since much of this evidence remains inadequately acknowledged in the critical mainstream, it seems worthwhile to provide a brief summary, augmented with a few original contributions.<sup>136</sup> A number of features of the Elsinore

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<sup>134</sup> For older rebuttals, see Battenhouse, “Ghost”, and P. N. Siegel, “Discerning the Ghost in *Hamlet*”, *PMLA* 78 (1963): 148-9. Kelly’s only substantial contribution to these discussions is the option of special purgatories, including the belief that some souls divide their time between the common purgatory underground and a special purgatory overground. This certainly offers an interesting parallel to the apparition in *Hamlet* – which claims to be “Doom’d for a certain term to walk the night,/ And for the day confin’d to fast in fires” (1.5.10-11) – but has no deeper consequences. According to the authorities Kelly himself cites, souls in special purgatories appeared to the living for the same reasons as those in the common purgatory, which in no known instance include a call to revenge. The stories in the *Golden Legend* in which “the dead” rise from their graves to deal with the living are also interesting, yet also without deeper consequence, for these walking, putrefying, shovel-wielding “dead” are obviously not ghosts, purgatorial or otherwise, and the link between these pagan folktales and the Catholic doctrine of purgatory is clearly nothing more than an appended rationalization. Kelly’s claim that such stories imply a “belief [...] that each soul’s individual portal to purgatory is its own tomb” (281) is desperate and undocumented. Also irrelevant is the story – previously discussed by Semper, “Ghost”, 227 – of the knight who left his horse to his cousin; the story does feature a genuine purgatorial ghost, who, however, behaves exactly *unlike* the apparition in *Hamlet*, wishing for, and ultimately being granted, *God’s* vengeance on the culprit.

<sup>135</sup> See H. Ulrici, *Ueber Shakspeare’s dramatische Kunst* (Halle, 1839), 233; H. Ford, *Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”* (London, 1900), 67-9; Battenhouse, *Tragedy*, 435, n. 58; and most comprehensively, but also most eccentrically, McGee, *Elizabethan Hamlet*. A number of other critics take the apparition as malevolent in a general, rather than a specifically demonological, sense: see, among others, G. W. Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, 4th ed. (1949; repr. London, 2001), 45-6; H. C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare* (1951; repr. Chicago, 1960), 1: 354, 382-4; L. C. Knights, *An Approach to Hamlet* (London, 1960), 46-8.

<sup>136</sup> The following account is based on the voluminous literature on the question of the “ghost”. The best single study remains E. Prosser’s *Hamlet and Revenge*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, 1971), 97-143; for a recent summary of the issues involved, albeit one evasive one on the question of the apparition in *Hamlet*, see the entry “Ghost” in M. Gibson and J. A. Esra, *Shakespeare’s Demonology* (London, 2014). On the period’s ghost beliefs more generally, see Marshall, *Beliefs*; *Early Modern Ghosts*, ed. J. Newton (Durham, 2002); S. Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World* (London, 2007); T. Chesters, *Ghost Stories in Late Renaissance France* (Oxford, 2011). Besides James’ *Daemonologie*, primary demonological sources in English published within Shakespeare’s lifetime include L. Lavater, *Of ghostes and spirites walking by nyght* (London, 1572), and P. Le Loyer, *A Treatise of Specters* (London, 1605). A related but idiosyncratic work is T. Nashe’s *Terrors of the Night* (London, 1594). A brief treatise in Latin was written around the same time at Oxford, but remained in manuscript; it is translated in

apparition find exact parallels in descriptions of the agency of demonic apparitions, by both Protestant and Catholic authorities. Namely, it appears at night, in armour, frowning angrily;<sup>137</sup> it appears in the form of a recently deceased relative; it is “offended” (1.1.53) at the invocation of Heaven;<sup>138</sup> it “started” (Q2, F; Q1 “faded”) at the crowing of the cock, “like a guilty thing/ Upon a fearful summons” (1.1.153-4);<sup>139</sup> it desires to speak to Hamlet in isolation; it intersperses its speech with allusions to hell; it dwells on the emotionally disturbing details of the murder;<sup>140</sup> it requires blood revenge on Claudius; and finally, while requiring blood revenge on Claudius, it urges forbearance with respect to Gertrude.<sup>141</sup> Some of these features would not necessarily mean much on their own, but as cumulative evidence they are unimpeachable: from the demonological point of view, the apparition can only be the devil.

This conclusion is further reinforced by the meticulous weaving of the ghost scenes in the first act. Thus it is significant that the apparition is referred to as a “spirit” only two times in the opening scene – and even then noncommittally, as further discussed below – in contrast

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“Randall Hutchins’ *Of Specters*”, *HLQ* 11 (1948): 407-29. As Marshall notes, “In the period before the civil war, there was no extensive and fully developed genre of ghost treatises in English, and the ghost-hunting historian is obliged to sift painstakingly for references through a mass of works of theology and religious controversy, writings on witchcraft, sermons and pastoral treatises, literary and dramatic pieces, ballads, pamphlets, and tracts” (*Beliefs*, 233). In the ensuing discussion, only original and/or contentious points are accompanied by specific references.

<sup>137</sup> There is a curious discrepancy here, however – noted by Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge*, 129 – between Horatio’s words at 1.1.65 (“So frown’d he once, [...] in an angry parle”), and his later report to Hamlet at 1.2.231 (“A countenance more in sorrow than in anger”).

<sup>138</sup> Note also that in Q1 the invocation of heaven is repeated as the apparition is “stalk[ing] away” from the stage: “Stay, speak, speak, *by heaven* I charge thee, speak” (1.40; the italicized words are absent from Q2 and F).

<sup>139</sup> One of several analogues here is Prudentius’ “Hymn at Cock-Crow”, a frequent school text: “They say that evil spirits which roam happily in the darkness of night are terrified when the cock crows, and scatter and flee in fear”; *Prudentius* (London, 1949), 1: 9. Possibly Horatio’s “extravagant and erring spirit” (1.1.159) carries an echo of Prudentius’ “vagantes daemones/ [...] exterritos”.

<sup>140</sup> Besides the demonological parallels, cf. Claudius on Laertes, Hamlet’s double, later on in the play, who “wants not buzzers to infect his ear/ With pestilent speeches of his father’s death” (4.5.90-1).

<sup>141</sup> The forbearance towards Gertrude was the single argument *against* identifying the apparition as demonic in R. H. West’s influential “King Hamlet’s Ambiguous Ghost”, *PMLA* 70 (1955): 1107-17: “Pneumatology attributes many sleights to devils, but never the sleight of prescribing Christian forbearance”; apart from this single element, the devil theory could be argued “in detail [...] from specifically pneumatological evidence” (1110). Possibly West’s reputation in this field discouraged others from questioning this claim, yet the fact is that the stated tactic is commonly attributed to the devil. For proof we need not look further than Shakespeare’s own Banquo: “oftentimes to win us to our harm/ The instruments of darkness tell us truths,/ Win us over with honest trifles to betray’/ In deepest consequence” (*Macbeth*, 1.3.12-4). Is not the forbearance towards Gertrude precisely such an honest trifle in comparison to the deepest consequence of blood revenge? For a specifically demonological parallel, see Lavater, who has an entire chapter on how “Duels doe sometimes bid men doe those things vvvhich are good, and auoid things that are euill: sometimes they tell truth, and for vvhat cause” (*Ghostes*, Y2r-3v). It is noted explicitly that the devil may exhort not merely to good but specifically Christian behaviour: “pray earnestly, come to Church often &c.” (Y2r).



to thirty-four instances of indeterminate appellations, namely “thing” (1.1.24), “dreaded sight” (28), “apparition” (31), “image” (84), “portentous figure” (112), “illusion” (130), and most frequently, simply *it* (including two instances of *a* and *he* which are to be taken as neuter).<sup>142</sup> The similarity in appearance to the deceased king is repeatedly stressed – “in the same figure like the King” (45), “like the King” (61), “so like the King” (113) – but this emphasis on similarity in appearance precisely foregrounds the possibility of non-identity in substance. “*What art thou*”, asks Horatio,

that *usurp*’st this time of night,  
Together with that fair and warlike *form*  
In which the majesty of buried Demark

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<sup>142</sup> Cf. Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge*, 98, 110; Kastan, *Will to Believe*, 121-2. Instances of *it* appear at 1.1. 32, 33, 43, 45, 46, 47, 48 (twice), 53 (twice), 55, 61, 128, 130 (twice), 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 152, 153, and 162. *A* is found at 1.1.46 (in Q2: “Looks a not like the king?”; Q1 and F standardize to “it”). *He* is found at 1.1.69 (“With martial stalk hath he gone by our watch”). There is also the Q2 stage direction at 1.1.130-1, “*It spreads his armes*”, which Jenkins emends to “*Ghost spreads its arms*”. “*It spreads its arms*” would have been less invasive, and also less prejudicial as to the identity of the apparition. There is, however, no reason for emendation, except in a more thoroughly modernized text, since *a*, *he*, *his*, *him* – as the stage direction so explicitly illustrates – can in this period still be “used generically, without consideration of gender” (*OED*, *he*, A.1.1.b). See also sense A.1.2.c, where such usage of *a* and *he* – “with reference to a female person or animal [...], or to person or animal or either gender” – is noted as characteristic of Shakespeare’s native West Midlands dialect. In this respect it is significant that usage of *a* is frequent in Q2, considered to be the most authentic text, but later almost wholly expurgated from F (see Jenkins’ note to 1.1.46). Given that the ratio of *it* to *a/he* (in reference to the apparition) is overwhelmingly in favour of the former – 26:2 for the first scene, 49:12 for the first act, 50:18 for the whole play – we should strongly suspect neuter usage in any instance of *a/he* which is not obviously meant as masculine. Jenkins is representative of the orthodox view when he notes that “In later scenes, *he* and *it* alternate, partly according as the Ghost is thought of in its character of apparition or as the spirit of Hamlet’s father [...]; but it would be wrong to look for any consistent distinction” (*ibid.*). The linguistic evidence strongly suggests otherwise, as does the fact that of the total of eighteen references to the apparition as *a/he*, ten are Hamlet’s. Furthermore, Hamlet and the apparition are the only characters to employ the terms *ghost* and *spirit* as definitely denoting the soul of the late king. The term *ghost* – which in this context, unlike *spirit*, must denote a revenant returned from the afterlife, however this afterlife is imagined, and in whatever theological or philosophical terms this return is explained – is not used by anyone until 1.5.4, when Hamlet uses it in the intense distress of his interview with the apparition. Hamlet is also the only character to use the term in the play, except for Horatio’s retort, general and humorous in import, that “There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave/ To tell us this” (1.5.130-1). On the terminology, see Handley, *Visions*, 8-9: “I have followed contemporary terminology in defining the eighteenth-century ghost, and my object of study, as ‘A spirit appearing after death’. Most often, these ghosts were well known or related to those who saw them. The term ‘ghost’ was most often used in this period to refer to the familiar spirit of a dead person”; Chesters, *Ghost Stories*, 3: “In English, to utter the word ‘ghost’ is usually to evoke a spirit whose identity has *already* been established as the soul of a dead man or woman.” By contrast, *spirit* is inconclusive, and has a remarkably wide range of meaning, including the three principal demonological options: revenant, angel, or devil (cf. Hamlet’s “The spirit that I have seen/ May be a devil” [2.2.594-5]). While Hamlet and the apparition are not the only characters to use the term *spirit*, they are the only characters who qualify it so as to unambiguously denote a revenant: “My father’s spirit” (1.1.255); “thy father’s spirit” (1.5.9); “Rest, rest, perturbed spirit” (1.5.190). By contrast, Horatio’s three uses of the term – “your spirits” (1.1.141), “this spirit” (1.1.176), “the spirit” (1.4.6) – connote no such identification, or even imply otherwise. In sum, the bulk of the terminology pointing to the apparition as a genuine revenant comes from Hamlet and the so-called “ghost” itself – the very two characters which are to be least trusted in this respect.

Did sometimes march? (1.1.49-50, emphasis mine)

Later on, in the second encounter, Horatio is the first character in the play to address the apparition as a “spirit”, but only in the context of enumerating a number of other options, without committing to any of them:

If thou hast any sound or use of voice,  
Speak to me.  
If there be any good thing to be done  
That may do thee ease, and grace to me,  
Speak to me;  
If thou art privy to thy country’s fate,  
Which, happily, foreknowing may avoid,  
O speak;  
Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life  
Extorted treasure in the womb of the earth,  
For which they say your spirits oft walk in death,  
Speak of it, stay and speak. (1.1.131-40)

Surely nobody is meant to believe that Horatio suspects the soul of the late king of Denmark to be concerned about some buried treasure. He is merely rehearsing the various popular opinions about ghosts, which Shakespeare wants to be heard at this point in the play, but is at the same time careful to distance his Wittenberg student from these opinions. That “your spirits”<sup>143</sup> walk in death is something “they say”, just like the other residually Papist folk beliefs voiced in the ensuing exchange with Marcellus (in which two further instances of “spirit” occur): “I have heard”, “Some say”, “they say”, “So have I heard and do in part believe it” (1.1.154-70). Even at the very end, when Horatio says that “This spirit, dumb to us,

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<sup>143</sup> Q1 and F give “you”, but Jenkins sides with Q2’s “your”: “Commonly used indefinitely, without reference to a particular person addressed, but imputing to hearers in general knowledge of the object condescendingly referred to. [...] The touch of familiarity, if a little surprising amid the solemn speech, accords with the sceptically tinged ‘they say’”. This fits the context perfectly, but reading “you” can also be construed in much the same sense.

will speak” to Hamlet (1.1.176), it is still “*this* spirit”, an expression that does not unambiguously identify the apparition as a revenant.

All of this is in stark contrast to the premature and ominously proleptic assurance displayed by Hamlet when notified of the apparition (1.2.189-258). Horatio’s report is at most inconclusive, and gives Hamlet no ground for the certainty with which he exclaims, the second he is left alone on the stage: “My father’s spirit, in arms!” Not “your spirits”, “this spirit”, “I think”, “they say”, “So have I heard and do in part believe it” – “*My father’s* spirit”.<sup>144</sup> For this also we have been carefully prepared, as Scene 2 takes considerable pains to establish the prince as melancholic, and thus especially susceptible to the devil’s wiles – another belief which has been amply documented from contemporary sources, and is also voiced explicitly by Hamlet himself, in the passage already cited above (2.2.594-99).<sup>145</sup> A pattern now begins of darkly ironic lapses of judgment on Hamlet’s part, which is to culminate in his interview with the apparition in Scene 5.<sup>146</sup> On top of all this, the speech of

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<sup>144</sup> Horatio’s initial use of “him” seems to be a concession to the rhetoric of the preceding exchange, and even then, his response to Hamlet’s “I shall not look upon his like again” is “My Lord, I *think* I saw him yesternight” (emphasis mine). Hamlet completely overlooks this “think”: “Saw? Who?/ [...] The king my father?” Apparently Horatio sees where such overexcitement might lead, for he asks Hamlet to “season [his] admiration for a while”, until given a proper report, in which he speaks of “a figure like your father”, “The apparition”, and “it” (as well as “he” and “him”, presumably to be taken as neuter). Again the outward similarity is emphasized – “I knew your father/ These hands are not more like” – but again it only brings into relief the doubts about the actual identity of the apparition. It makes no sense to say that something is *like* itself.

<sup>145</sup> See p. 180. With regard to the Lutheran element in the character of Hamlet, it is worth pointing out that the Latin proverb sometimes cited in this context – *Caput melancholicum diaboli est balneum* – would seem to have gained currency through Luther’s *Tischreden*. Luther reports it (affirmatively) as a saying of the monks, and also gives his own version: “Monachi dixerunt et vere: ‘Melancholicum caput est paratum balneum Diaboli’”; “Ubi est caput melancholicum, ibi Diabolus habet suum balneum”; quoted in N. L. Brann, *The Debate over the Origin of Genius during the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden, 2001), 6, n. 8. Of the relevant English sources, see, e.g., R. Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1621), E3r: “this humour of melancholy, is called *Balneum Diaboli*, the Devils Bath: the Divell spying his opportunity of such humours, driues them many times to dispaire, fury, rage, &c. [...] of all others Melancholy persons are most subiect to diabolically temptations, and illusions, and most apt to entertaine them [...] and the Divell best able to worke vpon them”.

<sup>146</sup> “If it assume my noble father’s person”, says Hamlet immediately upon being informed of the apparition, “I’ll speak to it though hell itself should gape/ And bid me hold my peace” (1.3.244-6) – but what if it is his friends who will bid him hold his peace, and hell itself that will gape in his noble father’s person? Later that night (in Q2), waiting for the appearance of what he has already decided is his “father’s spirit”, the prince meditates on how an otherwise good man can be brought to ruin by a single defect of his character – but is not he the man, his own melancholy precisely such an “o’ergrowth of some complexion” (1.4.27), his own ruin that is imminent? When the “questionable shape” appears, the Wittenberg-educated prince reaches for the essential dichotomies of Protestant demonology – “spirit of health or goblin damn’d/ [...] airs from heaven or blasts from hell/ [...] intents wicked or charitable” – but then simply overrides them in yet another conspicuous leap of judgment: “I’ll call thee Hamlet, / King, father, royal Dane” (1.4.40-5). He demands to be allowed to follow the apparition, as he does not set his life “at a pin’s fee/ And for my soul, what can it do to that/ Being a thing immortal as itself?” (1.4.65-6) – but if the apparition is a demon, it is precisely his soul that is at peril, and precisely because it is immortal; note also the inadvertent distinction between a human soul and the “thing”

the apparition adds a further incendiary element into the mix: Roman Catholicism. Up to this point it had only been vaguely intimated in the folk beliefs voiced by the sentinels, but now it takes centre stage, both metaphorically and literally. Having positioned itself on the trapdoor through which it is to sink down during its final “Adieu, adieu, adieu” (1.5.91), the apparition finally speaks, delivering what can only be described as a masterpiece of irony and insinuation, precisely in accordance with the traditional view of the devil as the father of lies and master double-talker.<sup>147</sup> It introduces itself as a soul returned from the afterlife, “thy father’s spirit”, and the exact verbal parallel to Hamlet’s “My father’s spirit” back at 1.3.255 underlines the fact that it is telling the prince exactly what his “prophetic soul” want to hear. It then goes on to refer explicitly, or allude in the most suggestive of terms, to an entire catalogue of major elements of Roman Catholic doctrine dismissed by Protestantism, and often derided in anti-Catholic polemic and satire: purgatory (“Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature/ Are burnt and purg’d away”), fasting (“to fast in fires”),<sup>148</sup> the Harrowing of

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beckoning into darkness. (As first noted by Spalding, *Demonology*, 53-4, 58, these lines, and those spoken by Horatio moments earlier [1.5.69-78], might be modelled on a specific passage in James’ *Daemonologie*, explaining that the devil appears to men in the form of a ghost “to obtaine one of two thinges thereby, if he may: The one is the tinsell of their life, by inducing them to such perillous places at such time as he either followes or possesses them, which may procure the same [...]. The other thinge [...] is the tinsell of their soule” [14r].) Hamlet draws his sword on his friends, threatening to “make a ghost of him that lets me” (1.5.85): the primary meaning, depending on the now obsolete *let*, meaning “hinder” (*OED*, v2), is clear, but do we not have a double entendre here, proceeding from the opposite meaning of the *let* that is still in use (*OED*, v1)? As suspected long ago by Seymour, *Remarks*, 2: 158: “To let, undoubtedly, signifies ‘to hinder,’ but I cannot help considering this expression as the offspring of that preposterous disposition which often prevails in these works, ‘to palter with us in a double sense’.” This pattern is especially consistent in the first act, but it continues, in a more dispersed form, throughout the play: one further, particularly suggestive instance occurs just seconds before the final appearance of the “ghost” in Gertrude’s chamber – “What devil was’t”, charges the dagger-speaking prince, with a vicious and by this point predictable irony, “That thus hath cozen’d you at hoodman-blind?” (3.4.76-7).

<sup>147</sup> On the movements of the “ghost” on the stage in this scene, see the reconstruction in Edwards’ edition (Figure 3), seconded by the analysis of Gurr and Ichikawa, *Staging*, 131. There is evidence that the “ghost” continued to descend through the trap in performances into the late nineteenth century (Figure 4). The tradition which attributes the devil with ambiguous speech has not been sufficiently stressed in previous criticism. Two notable literary instances include Shakespeare’s own Macbeth (“these juggling fiends [...] That palter with us in a double sense,/ That keep the word of promise to our ear/ And break it to our hope” [5.10.19-22]), and Milton’s *Paradise Regain’d* (the devil’s speech as “dark/ Ambiguous and with double sense deluding” [1.434-5]). For the conventions used in citing Milton’s works, see ch. 3, n. 13.

<sup>148</sup> Q1 has “confined in flaming fire” (1.5.4). There was a definite Papist stigma attached to fasting. A convenient summary of the differences appears in the note to Isa. 58:5 in the Douai-Rheims Bible: “Fasting is so often & clerly commended in holie Scriptures, that Protestantes (though not greatly affected therto) confesse it to be a good thing of it self, but in diuers respects detract much from it: denying it to be an act of religion, but only of bodily mortification: neither do al generally allow of prescript times, nor of abstinence from flesh those dayes, vvhich they thinke good to fast: and those vvhich do abstaine from flesh, say they do it not for religion, but for the ordinance of ciuil policie”; *The Holie Bible* (Douai, 1609). See also Theobald’s note to this verse: “And we are to observe, that it is a common saying of the *Romish* Priests to their People, *If you won’t fast here, you must*

Hell (“harrow up thy soul”),<sup>149</sup> the office of matins (“The glow-worm shows the matin to be near”),<sup>150</sup> and most explicitly, the Catholic sacraments of deathbed confession and extreme unction (“Unhousel’d, disappointed, unanel’d”).<sup>151</sup>

Point by point, however, every single one of these papist features is undercut by allusions to hell and the devil. Almost the very first thing the apparition says is “Pity me not” (1.5.5), a sentiment completely inconsistent with a purgatorial soul, but completely consistent with the devil, who is beyond pity, and to whom all mention of it is unbearable. If “sulph’rous and tormenting flames”, and the “prison-house” with its unspeakably horrifying “secrets”, are not inconsistent with the temporary suffering of purgatory, they are no less evocative of the “eternal blazon” of hell (1.5.21, emphasis mine). Similarly, even if we allow that the mention of Lethe, on the precedent of Dante, may point to the intermediate place in the afterlife, the

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fast in Fire”; *The Works of Shakespeare*, ed. L. Theobald (London, 1733), 7: 351, n. 18. I have not been able to track down this or any similar saying, whether in Theobald’s or in Shakespeare’s time.

<sup>149</sup> The verb *harrow* is used elsewhere in the play (1.1.47) in the sense of “to worry mentally” (see *OED*, *harrow*, v.2, b; *harry*, v., 1.4), but the rare phrasal form (“harrow up”), in combination with this particular object (“harrow up *thy soul*”), makes for an unmistakable reference to the Harrowing of Hell, a Roman Catholic doctrine dependant on the corollary doctrines of the *limbo patrum* and *limbo infantum*, or more broadly, the doctrine of purgatory. McGee is apparently the only critic to acknowledge this allusion (*Elizabethan Hamlet*, 65), but does not seem to have realized its full import.

<sup>150</sup> The matins are “One of the daily offices appointed in the breviary of the Western Christian Church, usually taken as forming (with the following office, lauds) the first of the canonical hours. Also: an analogous part of certain other minor devotions modelled on the canonical hours; esp. in *matins (and hours) of the Blessed Virgin Mary*” (*OED*, *matins*, 1.b). The term was retained in the first *Book of Common Prayer*, but is replaced by *morning prayer* in the 1552 and all subsequent versions; see *OED*, 1.c, noting this use as “App. rare before the 19th cent.”, and finding no examples between 1549 and 1832. The term is used after 1549 – in the 1568 Bishops’ Bible, for example – but is increasingly seen as papist, and certainly by 1600 it is a branded, specifically Catholic word; cf. McGee, *Elizabethan Hamlet*, 66; Kay Hoff, *Hamlet’s Choice*, 87. The cue was given by Luther and Clavin, and is picked up early on by English authors: see M. Luther, *A Commentarie... vpon the twoo Epistles generall of Sainct Peter and that of Sainct Iude* (London, 1581), R3r: among “our Monkes and Nunnes [...] There is neuer a one of theim that can truely saie: God hath commanded me to heare a Masse, to sing Mattins, to mumble vp the Seuene houres, or suche like Trumperies: For there is not so muche as one worde thereof spoken in all the Scripture”; J. Calvin, *Sermons... vpon... Galathians* (London, 1574), Hh1r: “what doth the deuoutest person among them [i.e., the papists], but only make much babbling and mumbling? He must here Mattins at night, and two or three Masses in a day [...]. And what are all these things? Surely [...] diuelishe deuises”; [G. Gnaphaeus], *A myrrour or glasse for them that be syke & in payne* (Southwark, 1536), A5v: “they rummelynge, and mummelynge of matyns, euensonge, and such lyke popyshenesse”; R. Lancelot, *A commentary... vpon... Ephesyans* (London, [1540]), H7r-v: “Purgatorye prestes or popishe prestes that can do nothing elles but mumble or patter ouer a payre or popyshe Mattyns or Masse”; J. Bradford, “To a woman that desyred to know hys mynde whether she, refraining from the Masse, might be present at the popyshe Mattyns or no” (letter of 4 July 1553), in *Certain... letters*, ed. M. Coverale (London, 1564), Ee2r-v; W. Perkins, *A Treatise tending vnto a declaration* (London, [1590?]), M8r: “their darkness can not comprehend the light of the Scriptures but they read them as me[n] do tales of Robin Hood, as riddles, or as olde priests read their Ladies matins, which they vnderstand not”.

<sup>151</sup> The references to Catholic rites were first recognized as such in C. Gildon’s *Glossary*, included in the additional, seventh volume of Rowe’s edition: *The Works of Mr. William Shakespeare. Volume the Seventh*, [ed. N. Rowe] (London, 1710).

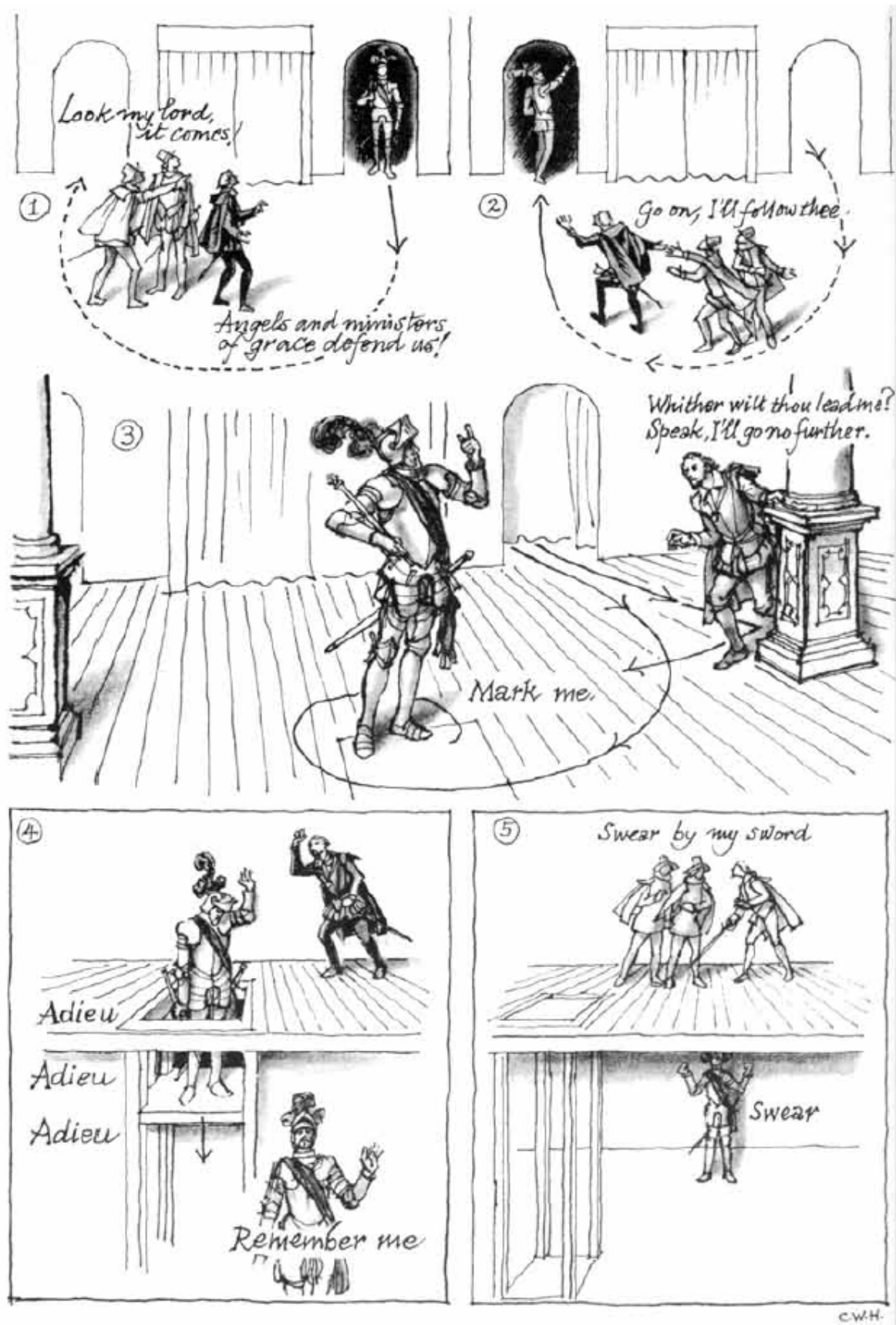


Figure 3. Reconstruction of the staging of 1.4.38-1.5.159 in *Hamlet*, ed. P. Edwards, updated ed. (Cambridge, 2003), 44; drawing by C. W. Hodges.



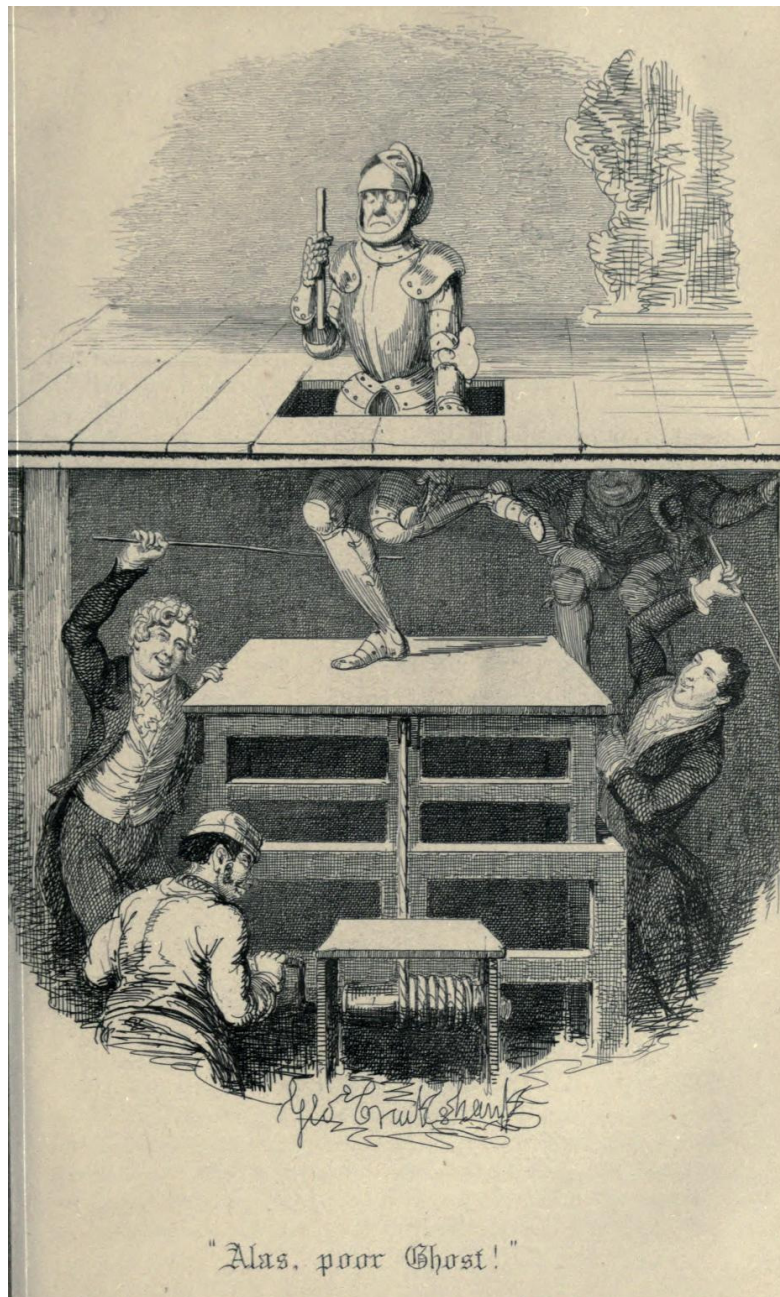


Figure 4. Drawing by G. Cruickshank, in G. Raymond, *The Life and Enterprises of Robert William Elliston* (London, 1857), facing p. 116, illustrating the anecdote of a prank played on the actor W. Dowton (1764-1851), imagined by the illustrator as performing the ghost in *Hamlet*. See also J. Boaden, *Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble* (London, 1825), 1: 98: Kemble's "kneeling at the descent of the Ghost was censured as a *trick*. [...] Henderson saw it, and adopted it immediately"; J. F. Kirk, "Shakespeare's Tragedies on the Stage", *Lippincott's Magazine*, n.s., 7 (1884): 501-10, 604-16: in the day of Garrick and Henderson, "as down to a very recent period, the business of the ghost was very clumsily managed. We have all seen him descend by a trap-door, liable either to stick on its passage or to drop with a jerk before the final 'Adieu' was uttered. On the last occasion on which I saw the play I found that all this had been changed. There was an ingenious and beautiful arrangement of blue lights, gauze curtains, and other paraphernalia, by which the mysterious figure was made to recede and vanish in a becoming and even marvellous manner" (508). Cf. R. A. Foakes, "'Armed at point exactly'", *SS* 58 (2005): 34-57, p. 40.

river is far more commonly placed in hell, and the vegetation of its bank seems decidedly infernal.<sup>152</sup> Finally, and most suggestively, the apparition, speaking of Gertrude, unmistakably echoes two key scriptural commonplaces of Christian demonology:

But virtue, as it never will be moved  
 Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,  
 So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,  
 Will sate itself in a celestial bed (1.5.53-6)

The first two verses are closely paralleled by the injunction in Galatians 1:8, “But though we, or an Angel from heauen preach vnto you otherwise, then that which we haue preached vnto you, let him be accursed”, while the third echoes 2 Corinthians 11:14, “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light”.<sup>153</sup> However, “wax[ing] desperate with his imagination” (1.5.87), Hamlet fails to pick up on any of these clues, and commits himself to the damning task of revenge. “I find thee apt”, the thing responds: “Fit, prepared, ready”, but also “Customarily disposed, given, inclined, prone”, “susceptible to impressions”.<sup>154</sup>

Fascinatingly, Hamlet’s descent is accompanied by a cluster of echoes of the earlier allegorical drama, almost as if to indicate not only a moral but also ontological degradation – a transformation such as underwent by the tyrant of Ariosto’s *Cinque Canti*, who “From the suspicious man [he] had been at first, [...] had now become Suspicion itself”.<sup>155</sup> In our familiarity with Q2’s “vicious mole” speech means we are not likely to think twice of the metaphor of “the pales and forts of reason”, but this is of course the central metaphor of a number of sixteenth-century English moralities, themselves structured on earlier plays of the

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<sup>152</sup> “[D]uller shouldst thou be”, the apparition admonishes, “than the fat weed/ That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,/ Wouldst thou not stir in this” (1.5.34). Interestingly, while Dante does place Lethe in his purgatory, he stresses the paradisiacal vegetation of its banks. By contrast, see M. Drayton, *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (London, 1597), D2r: queen Isabel wishes for a poison, or at least a very strong sleeping potion, made of “those blacke weedes on *Lethe* bankes below”; F. Beaumont and J. Fletcher, *The Humorous Lieutenant* (first performed c.1619), in *Comedies and Tragedies* (London, 1647), Sss2r: “*This dull root pluckt from Lethe flood,/ Purges all pure thoughts, and good*”.

<sup>153</sup> Line 1.5.55 in particular carries a sting in its tail, for if, in the logic of Shakespeare’s simile, the “radiant angel” is king Hamlet, and if, in the Corinthians passage, the “angel of light” is Satan, this strongly implies the conclusion that king Hamlet – i.e., the apparition before us – is Satan.

<sup>154</sup> See *OED*, *apt*, adj., 2.b, 4.c., 5.

<sup>155</sup> L. Ariosto, *Cinque Canti* (Berkeley, 1996), 2.17. The story is taken over in G. Gascoigne’s *Aduentures of Master F. I.*, in *Posies* (London, 1575), P7r-Q1r, and more famously in the story of Malbecco in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, 3.9-10.



same basic motif, appearing in its most elaborate form in the fifteenth-century *Castle of Perseverance*.<sup>156</sup> Similarly, when Hamlet exclaims that he will speak to the apparition “though hell itself should gape” and bid him hold his peace, there flickers before our eyes the traditional image of the jaws of hell devouring an endless procession of sinners, a common motif in the period’s art, but also a feature of the allegorical staging of the medieval and postmedieval drama. Furthermore, within seconds of Hamlet saying these words, we find ourselves in the midst of a scene which is the structural heart of the psychomachia genre, with the protagonist torn between the advice of a friend concerned about his “sovereignty of reason” (1.5.73) – and thus, perhaps, very fittingly named *Horatio* – and an apparition which is in all probability the devil, beckoning him into darkness.

The pattern culminates in the so-called “cellarage scene” which closes the first act (1.5.146-98). Here, for some fifty lines which have baffled readers for centuries, and are yet to be fully explained, the “medieval” allegorical drama suddenly erupts from the background and takes centre stage. Moments ago, having successfully infected Hamlet’s ear with a pestilent speech of his father’s death, the apparition had very appropriately sunk into “hell”. By the time Horatio and Marcellus catch up with him, the prince has also formally sworn himself to revenge, and has begun to speak in “wild and whirling words” (1.5.139) that his friends find difficult to understand. Swearing “by Saint Patrick” (142), and assuring them that the apparition is “an honest ghost” (144) – expressions alluding to purgatory and thus signaling his descent into papistry – he demands that they be sworn to secrecy.<sup>157</sup> As they are about to take an oath “on [his] sword”, the apparition cries “Swear” from below the stage, to which Hamlet responds: “Ah ha, boy, say’st thou so? Art thou there, truepenny?/ Come on,

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<sup>156</sup> Another notable fifteenth-century example is the Digby *Mary Magdalene*. Anne Boleyn famously played the part of Perseverance in a pageant based on the same structure, performed at court on Shrove Tuesday, 1522. On the allegory of the castle more broadly, see C. Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind* (Manchester, 2003). For examples of the personification of Reason, see H. Medwall, *Nature* ([London], 1534), and the three “wit and science/wisdom” plays; see M. Twycross, “John Redford, *Wit and Science*”, in *Handbook*, ed. Betteridge and Walker. In Medwall’s *Nature*, Reason plays the part exactly analogous to that of Horatio, fighting with Sensuality for the allegiance of the protagonist Man. The play does not dramatize the siege, yet Reason makes an elaborate comparison of “the lyfe of mortall creature/ To the assyge agayn a strong town or castell” (E3r-v).

<sup>157</sup> On the association of Saint Patrick with the Irish pilgrimage site known as St Patrick’s Purgatory, and with purgatory more generally, see Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 73-111.

you hear this fellow in the cellarage./ Consent to swear.” Why would Hamlet address the ghost of his father in this bizarre, irreverent manner? Eventually elaborate psychological explanations would be provided, yet for a long time critics could not make much sense of any of this, and many chose to regard the scene as a crowd-pleasing atavism from the Ur-*Hamlet*.<sup>158</sup>

John Upton would seem to have been the first to put criticism on the right track by explaining that Hamlet’s apparently erratic behaviour in this scene is modelled on the conventional stage antics of the Vice, who was “used to make fun with the Devil; and [...] had several trite expressions, as, *I’ll be with you in a trice: Ah, ha, boy, are you there, &c.* And this was great entertainment to the audience, to see their old enemy so belabour’d in effigy”.<sup>159</sup> Thus Hamlet cries “Ah ha”, insists repeatedly on his friends swearing on his sword (the Vice’s signature prop was his dagger of lath), and addresses the “fellow in the cellarage” by abusively humorous appellations commonly used of the devil. As Upton and most subsequent commentators fail to note, however, Hamlet’s adoption of such behaviour and language in addressing the supposed ghost of his father is additionally appropriate: the Vice is the devil’s son.<sup>160</sup>

“Truepenny” is the first of a series of such appellations, which continue through what is the least understood aspect of the scene, the threefold oath-taking, perhaps because it too is

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<sup>158</sup> The theory was accepted by no less a scholar than Chambers as late as 1895: “a survival from the older play, [...] retained to please the groundlings”; W. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, ed. E. K. Chambers (Boston, 1895), 140. One particularly insightful commentator was even of the opinion that “This whole scene” – *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 1 – “is unnecessary to the design of the play; and might, I believe, with advantage, be omitted”; E. H. Seymour, *Remarks... upon the Plays of Shakespeare* (London, 1805), 2: 138.

<sup>159</sup> J. Upton, *Critical Observations on Shakespeare* (London, 1746), 7-11, n. 5. This, along with Tschischwitz’s claim that the “repetition of the oath, the shifting of the ground, and the Latin phrase are taken from the ceremonies of conjurors” was still the only useful commentary to be found in the New Variorum: *Hamlet*, ed. H. H. Furness (1877; repr. New York, 1963). On “Ah ha” – “Aha”, “A ha”, etc. – as part of the conventional “expository formula” of the Vice, see B. Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (New York, 1958), 179; cf. McGee, *Elizabethan Hamlet*, 69-70. Feste’s lines in *Twelfth Night* shows that Shakespeare was perfectly familiar with these conventions: “I am gone, sir,/ And anon, sir,/ I’ll be with you again,/ In a trice,/ Like to the old Vice,/ Your need to sustain/ Who with dagger of lath/ In his rage and wrath/ Cries ‘Aha,’ to the devil,/ Like a mad lad,/ ‘Pare thy nails, dad,/ Adieu, goodman devil’” (4.2.123-34). See also the final chapter in de Grazia’s *“Hamlet” without Hamlet*.

<sup>160</sup> An early instance appears in the fifteenth-century *Assembly of Gods*, ed. J. Chance (Kalamazoo, 1999), where Vice appears as Pluto’s “dere son” (l. 605), leading the army of hell against that of Apollo’s captain, Virtue. Cf. Spivack, *Allegory of Evil*, 60-1, n. 4.

based on a stage convention from the earlier drama that has not come down to us.<sup>161</sup> For whatever reason, as Horatio and Marcellus take the oath, the apparition again cries “Swear”, now apparently directly beneath them, to which Hamlet responds by removing himself and the oath-takers to a different place on the stage: “*Hic et ubique?* Then we’ll shift our ground./ Come hither, gentlemen”.<sup>162</sup> As Greenblatt explains, *hic et ubique* is another Catholic tell-tale: the phrase appears in a Catholic prayer to be recited when entering a churchyard, for which one receives a pardon of as many days in purgatory as there are persons buried in that

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<sup>161</sup> That this scene, so marginal in modern criticism and performance, must have had considerable effect in Shakespeare’s day is evidenced by the borrowing of the seemingly trivial “truepenny” line – conflated with Marcellus’ “Hillo, ho, ho” (1.5.117) – in J. Marston’s *Malcontent*, first performed in or about 1603. *Truepenny* normally means “A trusty person, an honest fellow” (*OED*), but Shakespeare’s and Marston’s usage is of course ironic, and Marston’s “old truepenny”, just like Shakespeare’s “old mole” (see n. 164 below), is evidently an expression used of the devil. This is supported also by the context of Marston’s usage, where it is employed by a character both Vice-like and Hamlet-like, and refers to the villain of the play: “*Malevole*. Illo, ho, ho, ho! Art there, old truepenny? Where hast thou spent thyself this morning? I see flattery in thine eyes and damnation i’ thy soul. Ha, ye huge rascal!! *Mendoza*. Thou art very merry./ *Malevole*. As a scholar *futuens gratis*. How does the devil go with thee now?”; J. Marston, *The Malcontent*, ed. G. K. Hunter (London, 1975), 3.3.38-41. See also Nashe’s anti-Marprelate tract *An Almond for a Parrat* (London, [1589?]), B4v, where “the good olde true-pennie *Marprelate* [...] sits ruminating vnder an oake, or in the bottome of a haystacke, whose bloud shall be first spilte in the reformation of the Church”. Ruminating under an oak, or at the bottom of a haystack, is the devil: see the broadside ballad *The Devil’s Oak* (London, 1685): “And the Devil he was weather-beat/ and forc’d to take a tree;/ Because that the Tempest it was so great,/ his way he could not see:/ But under an Oak, instead of a cloak,/ he stood to keep himself dry”; S. Harsnett, *A Discovery of the Fravdvient practices of Iohn Darrel* (London, 1599), 11r: here the devil is said to assume the form of a haystack, rather than sit at the bottom of one, but probably a direct parallel could be found (this appears in what is presented as a quote from G. More’s *True discourse*, published a year later in Middelburg, but the passage in question [F1r] agrees only partly with Harsnett’s quote; possibly Harsnett knew an earlier version in manuscript; More notes that his *Discourse* was “*dispatched in December last. The difficultie of printing hath hindred the publishing of it thus longe*”). Jenkins also compares Greene’s *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, where the devil is referred to as “a plain, honest man” – to which we may also compare Hamlet’s statement, just moments earlier, that “It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you” (1.5.144). The line is most sensibly read with a stress on *there*, “Art thou *there*, truepenny?”, thus meaning, as Prosser notes, “So you *are* the devil?” (*Hamlet and Revenge*, 140).

<sup>162</sup> I side with Wilson (*What Happens*, 85), Jenkins (long note to 1.5.163, SD), and others who believe a threefold oath is being taken – namely, “Never to speak of this that you have seen” (1.5.161), “Never to speak of this that you have heard” (168), and “never [...] to note/ That you know aught of” the assumed “antic disposition” (180-6) – rather than the “ghost” interrupting the taking of a single oath. The logic behind this, and especially the role of the apparition, remains unclear. In *Der bestrafte Brudermord*, a German adaptation of either Shakespeare’s or the earlier *Hamlet*, surviving in a manuscript probably dating from 1710, the reason is explicitly stated: “Oh! I hear now what this means. It seems that the Ghost of my father is displeased at my making the matter known” (*Hamlet*, ed. Furness, 2: 126). This is clearly the germ from which Upton and later Wilson draw their interpretations of the scene, but the impression is that the original logic was already obscure to the German adapter, and that his Hamlet’s explanation is his own rationalization. Wilson points (*ibid.*, 82) to R. Scot, *The discoverie of witchcraft* (London, 1584), 1i4r-v, where there is an account of an oath between the sorcerer and his familiar which is to be sworn “three times”, “in reuerence (peradventure) of the Trinitie”, “and at euerie time kisse the booke, and at euerie time makes marks to the bond”. J. A. Quincy, Jr., “Some Notes on *Hamlet*”, *MLN* 28 (1916): 39-43, points to the episode of Balaam and Balak (Num. 22-24): when Balaam proves unable to utter a curse on the Isrealites, Balak twice asks him to remove to another place and try again; in the Chester mystery cycle, the episode was represented by having Balaam visit all four ends of the stage. Neither of these suggestions is very helpful, nor is the imitation in Fletcher’s *The Woman’s Prize* (*Comedies*, Qqqqq1v).

churchyard.<sup>163</sup> As the second oath is taken, the apparition cries again, again they change place, and again Hamlet addresses it as the devil: “Well said, old mole. Canst work i’t’h’ earth so fast?/ A worthy pioneer! Once more remove, good friends.”<sup>164</sup> Finally, as the third oath is being taken, the apparition cries “Swear” for the fourth and last time, and Hamlet breaks off the pattern with “Rest, rest, perturbed spirit”.

The effect of all this would be have been to a large degree comic, indeed farcical, and if we keep this in mind we will not be puzzled by the irreverent nature of the early references and allusions to the play, and the fact that they so often portray the prince as a figure of ridicule, and hint at the infernal rather than purgatorial origin of the “ghost”.<sup>165</sup> We should

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<sup>163</sup> *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 16, 234-5: “In the context of the Ghost’s claim that he is being purged, and in the context, too, of Hamlet’s invocation of Saint Patrick, the words *hic et ubique*, addressed to the spirit who seems to be moving beneath the earth, seem to be an acknowledgment of the place where his father is imprisoned.” While this is true, Greenblatt fails to take into account the simultaneous references to hell and the devil. He notes that the custom ridiculed in T. Rogers’ 1607 *Catholic Doctrine of the Church of England*. For another example, see O. Ormerod, *The Pictvre of a Papist* (London, 1606), Y4r: Ormerod’s Minister lists twenty-five points of comparison between the doctrine of Roman Catholics and “Turkes”, the twenty-first being that “The Turkes pray for the dead; so do you, and that especially when you go ouer any Church-yard saying: *Auete omnes animæ fideles, quarum corpora hic et vbiq[ue] requiescat in puluere*”, etc.

<sup>164</sup> For “old mole” and “worthy pioneer” as denoting the devil, see Jenkins’ long note to 1.5.157, and the references there. In addition, see *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. D. Searby, intro. and notes B. Morris (Oxford, 2006-), 3: 61: “What does the mole burrowing in the earth symbolize if not the devil who burrows about unseen and upsets the soul?”; J. Melton, *Astrologaster* (London, 1620), L1r, aligning the four devils of fire, air, water, and earth, with the salamander, the chameleon, the herring, and the mole; W. Charleton, *The Darkness of Atheism Dispelled* (London, 1652), 2B1v: “that subterraneous Mole, the *Devil*”. The real giveaway, however, is the collocation “Old Mole”: see the *OED* entry for *devil*, 1.1.a, addressed “in popular or rustic speech by many familiar terms as Old Nick, Old Simmie, Old Clootie, Old Teaser, the Old One, the Old lad, etc.” The line is echoed in Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, in reference to the villainous Hippolita: “Work you that way, old mole?” (2.2.139); J. Ford, “*’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*”, ed. M. Lomax (Oxford, 1995).

<sup>165</sup> On the early allusions, see S. N. Greenfield, “Quoting *Hamlet* in the Early Seventeenth Century”, *MP* 105 (2008): 510-34; de Grazia, “*Hamlet*” without *Hamlet*, 8-9, and n. 13: “In the early decades of performance, *Hamlet*’s signature action may have been not paralyzing thought but frenzied motion”, and “his hyperactivity would have linked him more with the roustabout clown of medieval folk tradition than with the introspective consciousness acclaimed by the modern period.” Parodic references include A. S[coloker?], *Daiphantvs* (London, 1604), A2r: “Faith it [i.e., the author’s poem] should please all, like prince *Hamlet*. But in sadnesse, then it were to be feared he would runne made: Insooth I will not be mooneticke to please”; G. Chapman, B. Jonson, and J. Marston, *Eastward Hoe* (London, 1605), D3r: a minor character is introduced rushing onto the stage (“*Enter Hamlet a footeman in haste*”), solely for the purpose of occasioning a brief laugh at his expense – “Sfoote *Hamlet*; are you madde?”; F. Beaumont, *The Woman Hater* (London, 1607), D2r: “*Laza*. [...] speake I am bound [to heare.]/ *Count*. So art thou to reuenge, when thou shalt heare the fish head is gone, and we know not whither” (cf. *Hamlet*, 1.5.6-7); T. Dekker, *The Dead Tearme* (London, 1608), G3r, describing a scam perpetrated by two con-men: “Sometimes would he ouertake him, and lay hands vppon him (like a Catch-pole) as if he had arrested him, but furious *Hamlet* woulde eyther breake loose like a Beare from the stake, or else so set his pawes on this dog that thus bayted him, that with tugging and tearing one another frocks off, they both looked like mad *Tom* of Bedlam.” For early references implying the demonic nature of the apparition, see Beaumont’s *Woman Hater*, where the Gondarino, pursued by Oriana, addresses her with words echoing *Hamlet*, 1.1.2 and 1.1.43: “It comes againe; new apparitions,/ And tempting spirits: Stand and reuele thy selfe,/ Tell why thou followest me? I feare thee/ As I feare the place thou camst from: Hell” (D4r); I. M. S., “On Worthy Master Shakespeare and his Poems”, in *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies* (London, 1632), \*3r, praising Shakespeare’s ability to “blowe ope the iron gates/ Of death and Lethe, where confused lye/ Great

probably suppose that most saw that Hamlet is sick, that his head is the devil's bath, and that he is falling to the powers of evil. Yet as already Corbin argued in his early study – incidentally one of the better examples of how daring and radical the much-maligned “old historicism” was in its day – mental illness, true or feigned, elicited little sympathy from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century playgoer.<sup>166</sup> Hamlet's psychological disintegration after the encounter with the apparition, which most of the audience must have at least suspected to be the devil, would not have endeared them to his plight, especially those of them who also recognized that it was paralleled by a descent into papistry. “O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?/ And shall I couple hell?” (1.5.92-93). What else is there besides heaven, earth and hell? For a Wittenberg-educated prince of Denmark, the answer should be “nothing”, yet this prince swears by Saint Patrick, judges the apparition to be “an honest ghost”, and admonishes his fellow student that “There are more things in heaven and earth, [...] Than are dreamt of in your philosophy” (1.5.175).

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heapes of ruinous mortalitie./ In that deepe duskie dungeon to discerne/ A royall Ghost from Churles”. Of even greater interest is the representation of the apparition in the *Brudermord*, which opens with a Senecan prologue unambiguously defining its moral perspective, as well as the origin of the so-called “ghost”. Night appears, boasting of her power “To practice evil, to afflict mankind”, and summons the three furies “From Acheron's dark pit”, instructing them to “Kindle a fire of revenge, and let the sparks fly over the whole realm; entangle kinsmen in the net of crime, and give joy to hell, so that those who swim in the sea of murder may soon drown” (*Hamlet*, ed. Furness, 2: 122). The “ghost” that soon appears is blatantly, farcically malevolent. Even before its appearance, one of the sentinels reports his initial sighting, which has given him “a hell's sweat”; he is admonished by his comrade, for a soldier “must fear neither friend nor foe; no, nor the devil himself”. Presently, however, “*Ghost of the King approaches the Sentinel, and frightens him, and then exit*”; moments later, the apparition returns and “*from behind gives him a box on the ear, and makes him drop his musket*”, causing him to cry, “The devil himself is after me.” The sentinel – who had previously invoked Catholic saints: “O holy Anthony of Padua, defend me! [...] O Saint Velten [sic]!” – reports to Horatio that the apparition “set upon me so that I fancy myself a live man in purgatory”. However, informed of an apparition in the likeness of his late father, that “does much harm to the sentinels on this post”, the German Hamlet hopes they are mistaken, “for the souls of the pious rest quietly till the time of their resurrection”.

<sup>166</sup> See Corbin, *Elizabethan Hamlet*, a study, as stated in its subtitle, *of the Sources, and of Shakespere's Environment, to show that the Mad Scenes had a Comic Aspect now Ignored*. “It is a fact too often forgotten”, writes Corbin, “that bear baiting was a national sport with our forefathers, and that the merriment of their dinner tables was supplied by idiots and madmen”, “an attitude towards acts of cruelty and insanity which is incredible to any one brought up amid the sensibility of modern life” (33-4). How novel such ideas were at the time comes across vividly in the brief and notably restrained “Prefatory Note” contributed by F. Y. Powell: “it seemed to me”, he writes, “that [Corbin] had got hold of a truth that has not been clearly, if at all, expressed in our Elizabethan studies – to wit, that the 16th century audience's point of view, and, of necessity, the playwright's treatment of his subject, were very different from ours of to-day in many matters of mark” (vii). For the basic idea Corbin is indebted to his Harvard lecturer B. Wendell; see Wendell's *William Shakspeare* (New York, 1894): “Elizabethan England was childishly brutal. [...] In actual lunacy, [...] the England of Elizabeth saw not something horrible, but rather conventionally comic – much as drunkenness is still held comic on the stage. In physical suffering it often saw mere grotesque contortion: witness the frequency of trashing in old comedy. [...] There are few facts in the Elizabethan drama which more strongly emphasize the remoteness from ourselves not only of Elizabethan England, but also of Shakspeare, the Elizabethan playwright” (155-6).

Finally, while the audience would have sympathized with the prince's desire for revenge, this sympathy would not have extended to his decision to act on this desire.<sup>167</sup> This is premeditated murder, and the terminology of Hamlet's fall is unmistakable: "thy commandment all alone shall live/ Within the book and volume of my brain,/ Unmix'd with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!" (1.5.102-4). "[W]ould an Elizabethan audience fail to see", asks McGee, "a blasphemous parody of God giving the Tables of the Law to Moses?"<sup>168</sup> The anticly disposed Vice is out of the box; riotous blasphemy is to be expected. Evil is now Hamlet's good, and he will make a heaven – "Yes, by heaven!" – out of hell. The act of writing down his wrathful *sententia* into his freshly erased "tables" is more than reminiscent of the act of signing an infernal contract.<sup>169</sup> Horatio's "Heavens secure him!" comes too late. "I have sworn't./ [...] So be it." Hamlet has made his pact with the devil.

Obviously, this takes us very far from the ordinary understanding of the play, not to mention that it denies utterly any idea of Catholic sympathies at work in it. "Many readers", writes Prosser in the conclusion of her argument for the demonic ghost, "have long been objecting, 'But how is such an interpretation possible when it conflicts with our instinctive impression of the Ghost?' I believe this interpretation is the only one that corresponds to our instinctive impressions – or would be, if we were free to react naturally, without misleading preconceptions fostered by critical and theatrical tradition."<sup>170</sup> Prosser is a sound and sober

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<sup>167</sup> See Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge*, 3-94. Even F. Bowers, whose *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy* (1940; repr. Princeton, 1966) popularized the much-abused idea of the Elizabethan's supposed "ambiguity" towards revenge, inevitably concludes that this ambiguity only goes so far: "the revenger of the drama started with the sympathy of the audience if his cause were good and if he acted according to the typically English notions of straightforward fair play. It was only [...] when he turned to 'Machiavellian' treacherous intrigues that the audience began to veer against him. That the majority of stage-revengers [...] met their death, may be attributed either to the fact that they turned from sympathetic, wronged heroes to bloody maniacs whose revenge might better have been left to God; or else that the strain of the horrible situation in which they found themselves so warped their characters that further existence in a normal world became impossible and death was the only solution" (40).

<sup>168</sup> *Elizabethan Hamlet*, 9.

<sup>169</sup> Indeed, the entire passage reads like a travesty of 2 Cor. 3:3: "Forasmuche as ye declare that ye are the epistle of Christ ministred by vs, and written, not with ynke, but the spirite of the lyuyng God, not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart." Hamlet's actions reverse Paul's injunction: he goes from metaphorically writing in his "table of memory" and "book and volume of [his] brain", to actually writing, in an actual table – from the New to the Old Testament, as befits someone about to make a formal vow to revenge. I quote the Bishops' Bible here – *The holie Bible* (London, [1568]) – as it corresponds to Hamlet's "table" and "tables" (1.5.98, 107); the Geneva has "tablets". The Bishops' and the Geneva are the versions Shakespeare was most familiar with: see N. Shaheen, *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays* (Newark, 1999), 38-48.

<sup>170</sup> *Hamlet and Revenge*, 141.

historicist, arriving at the above judgment by a meticulous appraisal of the available textual and contextual evidence. It is worth pointing out, however, that it is not only the scholars who have felt this. Critics have felt it too. Harold C. Goddard, for example, as thoroughbred a Shakespearean critic as one can imagine, whose 1951 *Meaning of Shakespeare* is one of the major monuments to the tradition – a solid, two-volume, 700-page slab of pure interpretation, untainted by the slavish pedantry of “embalming every scholarly fly that has fallen into the scholarly amber by dedicating to him the tombstone of a separate footnote”.<sup>171</sup> Goddard’s contempt pours steadily on these wretches, pestering him with “those strange abstractions, ‘the Elizabethan audience’ and ‘the Elizabethan playgoer.’ As if the nature of the human imagination, which has scarcely altered in a thousand years, must step aside in deference to ‘the conventions of the Elizabethan stage’!”<sup>172</sup> The most pitiful of all, as it happens, are those who have wasted their time trawling through the ghost-lore of the age. “The whole thing is reduced to absurdity when we begin to hear, as we do, of ‘Elizabethan ghosts.’ Shakespeare’s lifelong pity for ‘the fools of time’ suggests what he might have thought of this way of approaching his works.” If anywhere, then, here is a critic that would have considered the present study as simple nonsense. Yet for all this, Goddard’s ghost is deeply malevolent. “I once asked”, he writes, towards the end of his *Hamlet* chapter,

a young girl (barely over the border of childhood) to whom I had read *Hamlet*, whether she thought the Ghost was Hamlet’s father or the devil. I like to get a fresh reaction of innocence to a masterpiece, uncontaminated by traditional critical opinion. “I don’t see that it makes any difference,” she said, “I should think it would be just the same.” “Just the same?” I inquired, arrested. “Well,” she explained, “I should think that whoever told you to kill somebody was the devil.”<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Goddard, *Meaning*, 1: x.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 8.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 382.

Hamlet, the quintessential modern hero, behaving like the quintessential medieval buffoon, the allegorical son of Satan; the supposed ghost of his father dutifully checking every box in the demonologist's questionnaire, and boasting his Papist credentials – even if we agree that this is what Shakespeare labours to impress upon the more perceptive members of his audience in the first act of the play, what are we to make of it in a larger context? While, again, a comprehensive reading is beyond the scope of this chapter, in this section I will suggest a polemical perspective in which such a Hamlet and such a ghost make sense, a perspective which emerges readily enough once it is recognized that, while certainly present, the anti-Catholic element is only one side of the play's double-edged satirical blade.<sup>174</sup>

*Hamlet* is not only anti-Papist but also anti-Puritan, and it is this point of view, aligned with the dominant discourse of Church of England orthodoxy, which not only accommodates the broadest range of the play's religious references and allusions, but also uncovers a more comprehensive allegorical subtext at work, and indicates for whom this subtext was primarily intended, and what contemporary issues it seeks to address.

The discourse which differentiated the three competing religious factions in England as Protestant, Puritan, and Papist, and which equated the latter two as the twin enemies of the former, seems to have been firmly established by the late 1590s.<sup>175</sup> Thus in 1590 Richard Harvey writes that he “hard say a good old Doctor [...] found out *Puritanisme* in *Papistry*”,

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<sup>174</sup> In presenting his ghost-devil as Catholic, Shakespeare is drawing on a long tradition in English Protestant drama. See J. D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama* (Cambridge, 2000), 84-6: “In *Johan Baptystes Preachynge* (1538) Bale [...] for the first time openly identified the devil with traditional religion itself – a model that countless dramatists, including Shakespeare, would imitate after him. [...] His influence on other playwrights is apparent in the persistent pattern of having infidels and vices betray themselves by their pious allusions to the old faith and by their vigorous Catholic oaths.” The most famous dramatic example of the devil's equation with Roman Catholicism was, of course, Marlowe's *Faustus*. When the devil first appears in his true form, Faustus sends him away as “too ugly to attend on” him: “Go and return an old Franciscan friar,/ That holy shape becomes a devil best”; C. Marlowe, *Dr Faustus*, ed. R. Gill, 2nd ed. (1989; repr. London, 2004), 1.3.25-7. See Figure 5.

<sup>175</sup> In calling attention to this discourse, my intention is not to polemicize with the two tendencies in recent historiography of the English Reformation that have drawn attention to the limitations of this terminology, namely the tendency to lessen the divide between many of so-called “Puritans” and the Church of England, and the tendency, already discussed above, to posit a longer afterlife for traditional beliefs and practices than earlier scholarship had allowed. My claim is that there was a *discourse*, propagated by the Church of England mainstream, which did differentiate these three categories (Protestant, Puritan, Papist); that there was a particular



apparently taken with the novelty of the conceit.<sup>176</sup> Two years later, Matthew Suttcliffe sarcastically remarks that “Onely this thing is herein commendable, that puritans & papists are very fitly ioyned together in this case. Both deny the supremacie alike, both depraue the gouernme[n]t alike, both rayle against our Communion booke alike: and therefore (that all may be alike) both deserue to be vsed alike”.<sup>177</sup> At the 1593 trial of the dissenters Henry Barrow and John Greenwood, Thomas Owen is reported as saying that “bothe they [i.e., the puritans] and the papists were pioners for the king of Spaine, the one beginning at the one end, and the other at the other end, and so at the last they would mete at the harte of the



Figure 5. Mephistopheles as Franciscan friar; *The Historie of the Damnable Life, and deserued Death of Doctor Iohn Faustus* (London, 1608), facing the title page. Summoned by Faustus, the devil assumes several forms before finally appearing “in the manner of a gray Fryer” (A3r).

topos in this discourse, which equated the Puritan and the Papist as the twin opponents of the (Church of England) Protestant; and that this discourse did relate to a *political*, if not necessarily doctrinal or social, reality.

<sup>176</sup> *Plaine Percevall* (London, [1590]), C4r.

<sup>177</sup> *An Answer to a Certaine Libel* (London, 1592), Z3v.

midle”.<sup>178</sup> A manuscript report containing Owen’s statement reached Robert Parsons, who reports it in paraphrase and comments on its wittiness.<sup>179</sup> The topos also appears in two of John Harington’s epigrams, “A Paradox. To Cinna the Brownist” and “Of the Papists Feasts, and the Brownists Fasts”.<sup>180</sup> This discourse received a major reinforcement with the publication, within days of Elizabeth’s death on 24 March 1603, of the first publicly available edition of James I’s *Basilikon doron*.<sup>181</sup> In spite of the addition of a cautiously worded preface, the work still denounced, in the plainest of terms, both Puritans and Papists, and moreover, it denounced them in the same breath, and specifically with respect to the paramount question of royal authority.<sup>182</sup> Nor was this a purely polemical gesture: James was actually appealed to by representatives of all three factions before even having the chance to be crowned king of England. As the royal entourage was making its way towards a plague-ravaged London in April and early May of 1603, he met with various representatives of the conformist view, but was also tricked, on 17 April in York, into accepting a petition on the

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<sup>178</sup> *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow*, ed. L. H. Carlson (1970; repr. London, 2003), 202.

<sup>179</sup> *Newes from Spayne and Holland* ([Antwerp], 1593), E1r: “And wittely spake Sargent Owin of late in my opinion, at the Barr against Barrow and Grenewode, that were arayned and executed, that puritans and papists were like dangerous pioneers, that began to dig at the two endes, and would inclose at the length the protestant in the middle, and meete at the very hart of the realme, vnderminyng the same before it could be remedied.”

<sup>180</sup> See *The Letters and Epigrams of John Harington*, ed. N. E. McClure (Philadelphia, 1930): “Pure *Cinna* deemes I hold a Paradox,/ Not to be prov’d, but vnto stones and stox,/ That brownists are vnto the papists neerer/ Then Protestants: tis cleer thear’s nothing cleerer” (289-90); cf. n. 183.

<sup>181</sup> On the circumstances of the publication, and the immediate popularity of the work, see the account in Craigie’s edition: *Basilikon Doron*, ed. J. Craigie (Edinburgh, 1944). The London edition was reportedly “sent to press within an hour of the Queen’s death”, and was being read by 30 March, only two days after it was entered on the Stationers’ Register. In the first few weeks around 14,000 copies were printed, and according to Francis Bacon, the book was in “every man’s hand”; see *Basilikon Doron*, ed. Craigie, 2: 18, n. 2; *Selected Writings*, ed. N. Rhodes, J. Richards, and J. Marshall (Aldershot, 2003), 199, n. 1. The publication immediately upon Elizabeth’s death cannot have been, as Craigie believed, by “happy but undesigned chance” (2: 2), but was rather part of a carefully prepared and timed propagandist effort in favour of the new king.

<sup>182</sup> See James VI/I, [*Basilikon doron*] (London, 1603): e.g., “I am no Papist” (C4v); “hate no man more than a proud Puritan” (E5r); “both the extremities, as well as [...] the vaine Puritane, so [...] Papall Bishoppes” (E5v); “a king is not *merè laicus*, as both the Papistes and Anabaptistes would haue him, to the which errour also the puritanes incline ouer-farre” (17v). Cf. K. Fincham and P. Lake, “The Ecclesiastical Policy of James I”, *Journal of British Studies* 24 (1985): 169-307: “This new epoch of Protestant virtue and Christian unity was threatened by two disaffected and aggressive minorities, the papists and the Puritans. Although the sermons of 1606 were directed primarily against the threat of Puritanism, or rather Presbyterianism, the stability of church and state was no less threatened by the papists, as the preachers themselves acknowledged in a number of asides. The king himself never tired of pointing out the equivalence of these two menaces, a view that may be traced in royal correspondence at the start of the reign through to the king’s speeches in his final parliament of 1624” (170).

behalf of the English Catholics, and was presented, towards the end of the month, with the Millenary Petition.<sup>183</sup>

Corresponding to this urgent political reality, and now enjoying explicit royal favour, the discourse of the Puritan-Papist caught on, and there is evidence that Shakespeare was quite familiar with this discourse and the associated controversies. In late September or early October 1603, the heads of the University of Oxford issued their *Answer* to the Millenary Petition, in the epistle to which, addressed to James, they listed seven counts in which they detected “a certeine Semblance [...] in two contrary Factions, that haue shewed themselues by their Petitions, discontented by the præsent State, & Ecclesiasticall Government: namely in the *Papists* and the *Puritants* [sic]”.<sup>184</sup> “Verily”, the text continues,

these men are like *Samsons Foxes*. They have *their heades severed* indeed; the One sort looking to the *Papacy*, the Other to the *Presbiterie*. But they *are tyed together by the taitles, vvith fire brandes betwveene them*. Which if they bee not quenched in time, are able to set the whole Land in a Combustion and Vprore.<sup>185</sup>

Other authors followed, enlarging the conceit into entire pamphlets and treatises, culminating in David Owen’s 1610 *Herod and Pilate reconciled: or, The Concord of Papist and Pvritan... for the Coercion, Deposition, and Killing of Kings*, but appearing until the final decades of the

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<sup>183</sup> See *The True Narration of the Entertainment of his Royall Maiestie* (London, 1603), D3v: “This Sunday [i.e., 17 April] was a Seminary Priest apprehended: who before (vnder the title of a Gentleman) had deliuered a Petition to his Maiestie, in the name of all the English Catholikes”. According to *The Answer of... the Vniversitie of Oxford... To the humble Petition* (Oxford, 1603), ¶4v, note *a*, the Millenary Petition was presented to James in April (and not, as is sometimes claimed, upon his arrival into London on 11 May). Already by 3 April, James had received an elaborate gift from John Harington, which included a “Gratulatory Elegie of the peaceable entry of King Iames”: “Toy, Protestant; let papists be reclaymed;/ Leave, puritan, your supercilious frowne” (*Letters and Epigrams*, 320).

<sup>184</sup> *Answer*, ¶¶2r. The *Answer* is presented as *Agreeable, vndoubtedly, to the ioint and Vniforme opinion, of all the Deanes and Chapters, and altogether the learned and obedient Cleargy, in the Church of England*. The Oxford *Answer* was preceded by a grace mandating conformity passed at Cambridge on 9 June. James had met with the heads of the University of Cambridge at the house of Oliver Cromwell, where the entourage stayed on 27-29 April (*True Narration*, F1v). A letter of support from Cambridge, dated 7 October, is included in subsequent editions of the *Answer*, and is said to have been received “Immediately after the Printing” of the first edition. Thus the *Answer* was published in late September or early October, soon after James’ meeting with the heads of Oxford at Woodstock between 11 and 15 September, during his first progress, where the king “promised them his favour, and presence also, when GOD should abate the infection now raging in his Kingdom”; A. Wood, *The History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford*, ed. J. Gutch (Oxford, 1792-96), 2: 281. These documents constitute a reaction to further activities by the advocates of the Millenary Petition, who had been campaigning for signatures to accompany a revised edition of the Petition. See N. Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism* (Manchester, 2001), 265-7.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶¶2v.

century.<sup>186</sup> The most exact parallel, however, with the metaphor found in the *Answer*, down to specific points of verbal correspondence, comes from Lavatch, the clown of Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*: "For young Chairbonne the puritan and old Poisson the papist, howsome'er their hearts are severed in religion, their heads are both one: they may jowl horns together like any deer i'th' heard" (1.3.51-5).<sup>187</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine this discourse and these controversies in further depth. What is important is that they were current at the time when Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, and that they offer a context in which a play about "a young man from Wittenberg, with a distinctly Protestant temperament, [...] haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost", is not necessarily ambiguous.<sup>188</sup> While such a play may have struck some of its less

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<sup>186</sup> D. Owen, *Herod and Pilate reconciled* (Cambridge, 1610); the work had several posthumous editions, in slightly altered form, and under alternative titles. See also O. Ormerod's *Pictvre of a Puritane* – paralleling his already cited *Pictvre of a Papist* – *Wherunto is annexed a short treatise, entituled, Puritano-papismus: or a discouerie of Puritan-Papisme* (London, 1605); [A. Cowley], *The Puritan and the Papist* ([Oxford], 1643). Owen borrows the metaphor of Samson's foxes: "The *Puritan-Church-Policie*, and the *Iesuiticall societie* began together: the one in *Geneva*, 1536. and the other in *Rome*, 1537. [...]. These (though brethren in sedition and headie) are *head-seuered*, the one staring to the *presbyterie*, and the other to the *Papacie*, but they are so fast linked behind, and *tayle-tied* together with *firebrands* betweene them, that if they be not quenched by the power of Maiestie, they cannot chose (when the meanes are fitted to their plot) but set the *Church* on fire, and the *state* in an vprore" (*Herod and Pilate*, ¶¶2r).

<sup>187</sup> *All's Well* was first printed in the 1623 folio, and no references to early performances have been found. The date is most often conjectured as 1604-05, but estimates have varied from 1601 to 1609. If the *Answer* is the source for this passage, then the play cannot be earlier than October 1603 (cf. n. 191). This fits well with the recent argument for a mid-1604 date by T. Reilly, "The 1604 Controversy", in *New Critical Essays*, ed. G. Waller (New York, 2007), who thinks the play "roughly coeval" with the Parliament debate on the Court of Wards and Liveries, which lasted from 30 March to 20 June 1604. The period between October 1603 and April 1604 would not seem to be out of the question. While the passages pointed out by Reilly clearly relate to this subject, the 1604 debate was, as Reilly himself notes, only the "first *formal*" and the "first *large-scale* opposition to the Court of Wards and Liveries" (209, 211, emphasis mine). According to H. E. Bell, *An Introduction to the History and Records of the Court of Wards and Liveries* (1953; repr. Cambridge, 2011), 135, "complaints against the evils resulting from sales of wardships and leases of the minor's lands" were already "long-standing" by "Elizabeth's time".

<sup>188</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 240. Other critics have similarly seen the religious conflict at the heart of the play's topical or allegorical dimension as one between Protestantism (rather than Puritanism) and Catholicism. Thus McGee interprets the play as anti-Catholic (and pro-Protestant); Milward and Oakes, among others, as pro-Catholic (and anti-Protestant); while Kay Hoff anticipates Greenblatt's position, namely that "*Hamlet* exploits religious issues that are exactly that – exploited. While they do bear witness to a theological sophistication of which Shakespeare has not been thought capable, and they evince, therefore, a deep, lively, and intelligent interest in religious matters, the theological issues expressed in *Hamlet* subserve Shakespeare's dramatic purposes" (*Hamlet's Choice*, 338). Cf. Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 254: "We do not [...] need to believe that Shakespeare was himself a secret Catholic sympathizer; we need only to recognize how alert he was to the materials that were being made available to him. At a deep level there is something magnificently opportunistic, appropriative, absorptive, even cannibalistic about Shakespeare's art". A minor difference is that Kay Hoff allows that *Hamlet* "may betray a personal aversion to Spanish-style Catholicism" (*Hamlet's Choice*, 338), while Greenblatt and most contemporary critics would be inclined to see a degree of sympathy to the old faith. See McGee, *Elizabethan Hamlet*; Milward, *Shakespeare the Papist*, 159-73; E. T. Oakes, "Hamlet and the Reformation", *Logos* 13 (2010): 53-78.

informed viewers and readers as curiously confused in religious matters, and while some may have missed the clues altogether, it would not have been so to anyone reasonably familiar with these very prominent and public debates, and the official position of the Church of England mainstream. Young Chairbonne the Puritan and old Poisson the Papist, both working on the behalf of their continental masters, were plotting to undermine the English church and state, and here was a play featuring a malcontent educated in one of the hotbeds of continental Puritanism, urged by a Catholic devil-ghost to commit regicide – both named Hamlet, underscoring their alignment and equivalence in the anti-English cause, with the old heresy fittingly represented as the father (and devil), and the younger as the son (and Vice). Precisely this, plotting to overthrow king and state, was the central charge levelled at the Puritan-Papist construct, and the play fully endorses this charge: the end result of the actions of young Chairbonne, undertaken at the bidding of old Poisson, is the extinction of the Danish royal family, and the fall of Denmark into the hands of a foreign power.

Furthermore, while agreeing with this general context, the play would seem to fit remarkably well with various circumstances specific to 1603, which is of course the date of its first quarto edition. England had a new king, whose three published works – freshly printed in London, and being the most obvious means by which the general public could become informed of his interests and opinions – were prominently concerned with demonology, the divine right of kings, and an ecclesiastical policy favouring a middle ground between the Puritan and Papist extremes.<sup>189</sup> The fact that Shakespeare's company was in the possession of a play whose most conspicuous features are a demonologically suspect apparition and an instigation to regicide, and which also, on a subtler level, relates both of these to current religious and political controversy and the Puritan-Papist topos, was thus either a stroke of spectacularly good luck, or, as seems more likely, the result of a deliberate attempt to respond to James' views and court his favour.<sup>190</sup> In addition, the play appears to have been written

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<sup>189</sup> On 3 April, just four days after the first London edition of the *Basilikon doron* is reported as already being read, editions of the *Daemonologie* (London, 1603) and *The Trve Lawe of Free Monarchies* (London, 1603) are entered in the Stationers' Register.

<sup>190</sup> A *Hamlet* by Shakespeare was in existence around 1600, and appears on the Stationers' Register on 26 July 1602, but the earliest known text – and the earliest publication to credit Shakespeare's company as *his*

with a university audience, among others, in mind. Although unique among Shakespeare's plays, the claim on the Q1 title page that the play was performed at the universities of Cambridge and Oxford is supported by both textual and contextual evidence, and gives us another performance context in which the allegorical subtext of the play would have been appreciated.<sup>191</sup>

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*Highnesse seruants* – could not have been published before the award of the King's Men patent on 19 May 1603, and late additions or alterations are at least a possibility. Discussions typically pass fairly lightly over the award of the royal patent, an event whose importance to Shakespeare and his fellow actors cannot be overemphasized. By May they were probably already on the road, and Shakespeare would have had ample time to familiarize himself with his new king's writings, and in the process notice, perhaps, how easily the old play could be made to resonate with the views and interests these exhibited. If not earlier in 1603, there is very good reason to believe, with Kiernan, that the play was performed before James and a courtly audience at Hampton Court, as part of the year's Christmas festivities – an audience on which play's various allusions and references to matters of theological and political controversy would not have been spent. See A. Kiernan, *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright* (New Haven, 1995), ch. 2. The titles of the plays performed by the King's Men are not recorded, but Kiernan's deduction that they included *Hamlet* seems warranted, especially in the light of the present argument. Aspects of Kiernan's discussion are unconvincing, but he does surmise that the play's presentation of a succession crisis would have been of interest to James, and that he would have been suspicious of the Catholic ghost.

<sup>191</sup> The London theatres had been closed since 19 March due to Elizabeth's illness, and by the end of the month the plague broke out. On 19 May the royal patent is awarded at Greenwich Palace. By this point the company was probably already on tour, and after 19 May they are recorded as the King's Men at Bath, Coventry, Ipswich, and Shrewsbury in 1602-03, and at Maldon and Oxford in 1603-04; E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare* (1930; repr. Oxford, 1951), 2: 328-9. The date of the Bath performance has been tentatively identified as 25 July 1603; see *REED: Somerset*, ed. J. Stokes and R. J. Alexander (Toronto, 1996), 876. Going by the entry of the payment of Oxford alone, the date of the performance could have taken place between 29 September 1603 and 29 September 1604. However, any such performance is extremely unlikely to have taken place between July 1603, when the plague reached Oxford, and February 1604, when it ceased (Wood, *History*, 2: 279-80). If, then, *Hamlet* was performed at Oxford in 1603, as stated on the Q1 title page – *As it hath beene diuerse times acted by his Highnesse seruants in the Cittie of London: as also in the two Vniuersities of Cambridge and Oxford, and else-where* – this would have been between 19 May and an indeterminate date in July. Records of 1603 performances close to Oxford – at Coventry, and especially the dated performance at Bath on 25 July – add further probability to this inference. The editors of the *REED* volumes for Cambridge and Oxford are sceptical about the performance of *Hamlet* on university grounds in the light of the well-known prohibitions against common players (*REED: Oxford*, 858-9; *REED: Cambridge*, 984-5). Nelson in particular suspects the Q1 claim to be "the printer's groundless boast", overlooking, apparently, the fact that the King's Men enjoyed a status like no other company in the land, and that their patent authorized them explicitly to perform "within the liberties and freedom of any city, university, town, or borough whatsoever within our said realms and dominions" (*Theatre*, ed. Wickham, Berry, and Ingram, 123, emphasis mine). As the king's own company, with express allowance to perform at the universities, it seem reasonable to suppose that they would have been exempt from the prohibitions, and so the claim on the Q1 title page may well be a boast, yet a very grounded one, parading the company's newly acquired special status. This is precisely one of the arguments in favour of university performance in the excellent article by M. Srigley, "Hamlet, 'the law of writ', and the Universities", *Studia Neophilologica* 66 (1994): 35-46. The *REED* editors inexplicably engage with Boas' early conjectures in "Hamlet at Oxford", *FR*, n. s., 94 (1913): 245-53, but not with any later scholarship opposing his view, beginning with W. J. Lawrence's "Belated Reply", *FR*, n.s., 106 (1919): 219-27. Perhaps understandably, given the archival orientation of the project, the editors also omit any consideration of the intra-textual evidence for university performance, discussed since E. B. Reed, "The College Element in *Hamlet*", *MP* 6 (1908-09): 453-68, and more comprehensively, J. M. Nosworthy, *Shakespeare's Occasional Plays* (London, 1965), ch. 10. A full investigation is impossible here, yet the following discussion proceeds on the assumption that university performances of *Hamlet* did take place, most likely between 19 May and July 1603.

Various bits of potentially relevant information are yet to be systematically examined in light of the present argument, and there are, of course, numerous other questions, not the least of them whether Hamlet can decode as “Puritan”, and if so, to what extent and with what emphasis. Of great interest here is the fact that Hamlet’s “Puritan” features have been noted independently of the present thesis. Waddington and others note a number of perceived similarities with Luther, most tangibly the physical appearance and the melancholy.<sup>192</sup> More recently, Hassel underscores Hamlet’s black garb, use of tables, sense of calling and appeals to “special providence” (5.2.215-16),<sup>193</sup> diatribes against sex, women, cosmetics, and other perceived moral evils, a vocabulary which often intersects with that ascribed to the Puritan stereotype, and is “reinforced by a syntax and sound also associated by the satirists with Puritan expressions of moral outrage” – but most importantly, “Hamlet’s conscious and unconscious hypocrisy”, which “wears many cloaks, and some are woven in the style of Puritan representation”.<sup>194</sup> Hamlet refuses to accept direct responsibility for the murders of Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern, and indirect responsibility for the death of Ophelia; he “resists the authority of a monarch’s request for ‘outward conformity for the sake of union,’ and in so doing helps propel the state into both reform and chaos”; perhaps most indicatively, he also “admits frustrated ambition as one of his motives for killing Claudius” – who “Popp’d in between th’election and my hopes” (5.2.65) – where “we see once more his complicated brush against what Hamilton calls ‘the conformist representation of the Puritan who, on a pretense of being busy about reform, seeks to realize his own ambitions’”.<sup>195</sup>

Again, however, this “unusually rich and sympathetic version of the often caricatured, oversimplified Puritan figure” is only one half of the play’s polemical vision.<sup>196</sup> Any reading which fails to acknowledge the opposite, anti-Catholic element at work – “absent from Hamlet’s usage”, Hassel finds, are the usual “derogatory references to Rome and the Papacy” – is inevitably drawn into the ambiguity argument, and the play remains an “odd and

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<sup>192</sup> See R. B. Waddington, “Lutheran Hamlet”, *English Language Notes* 27 (1989): 27-42.

<sup>193</sup> Thus Q2 and F; Q1 more explicitly “predestinate providence” (17.45).

<sup>194</sup> R. C. Hassel, Jr., “The Accent and Gait of Christians”, *Religion and the Arts* 7 (2003): 103-27.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 119, quoting D. B. Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England* (Lexington, 1992), 97.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

sometimes contradictory field of allusion and analogy”.<sup>197</sup> For one thing, Hamlet does make derogatory references to Catholicism, notably in the elaborate cluster of such references in his replies to the bewildered and comically uncomprehending Claudius, when summoned to divulge the hidden whereabouts of Polonius’ body (4.3.16-39). “Now, Hamlet”, the king demands, “where’s Polonius?”

*Ham.* At supper.

*King.* At supper? Where?

*Ham.* Not where he eats, but where a is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e’en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service – two dishes, but to one table. That’s the end.

*King.* Alas, alas.

*Ham.* A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat the fish that hath fed of that worm.

*King.* What dost thou mean by this?

*Ham.* Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.

The supper where one is eaten is the Lord’s supper, and the scatological idea of Christ being chewed, digested, and eventually evacuated is one of the staple tropes in the Protestant satire of the Catholic Eucharist.<sup>198</sup> From this, the prince moves on to a particularly ingenious allusion to the Diet of Worms, and given the context of the scene, to Luther’s examination at the 1522 Diet, before emissaries of the Catholic Church (“A certain convocation of politic worms are e’en at him”), and under the presiding of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid. 108, 119.

<sup>198</sup> Here again there would seem to be a conflation of “Papist” and “Puritan” features. Waddington was the first to see in this passage a “grotesque literalization” of the Lutheran doctrine of the Eucharist (“Lutheran Hamlet”, 28-30), whereas Greenblatt sees it as a “grotesquely materialist reimagining” of Roman Catholic of transubstantiation, adducing similar examples from Protestant satirists; see C. Gallagher and S. Greenblatt, *Practising New Historicism* (Chicago, 2000), 136-62; Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 240-4. Both are correct, because the point is precisely to highlight another aspect in which the Puritan is perceived as identical to the Papist, and vice versa.



(“Your worm is your only emperor for diet”).<sup>199</sup> All of this flies high above the head of Claudius – “Alas, alas”, “What dost thou mean by this?” – as it probably flew over the heads of most of Shakespeare’s contemporaries, but is precisely the kind of allusion that a more learned audience would have registered, and which would have alerted it to be on the lookout for an allegorical subtext pervading the play.

The king repeats the question: “Where is Polonius?” “In heaven”, answers the anticly disposed prince, “If your messenger find him not there, seek him i’t’h’other place yourself. But if indeed you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby.” This continues the logic of the exchange by adding a further element of Catholic doctrine commonly derided in Protestant polemic and satire: if Polonius is neither in heaven, nor in “th’other place”, he must be in the “lobby” of purgatory.<sup>200</sup> Again the king understands only the literal meaning, ordering his men to “Go seek him there”, to which Hamlet replies, bringing the sequence to an end, “A will stay till you come” – a piece of morbid humour, as Polonius’ body is not going anywhere, but also a veiled threat, implying that Polonius has more time to spend in purgatory than Claudius has left to live. Whether or not Hamlet actually believes this, or is merely keeping up with the logic of the exchange, is unclear, yet whether he is fully or only partly convinced, it is clear that the possibility has never left his mind, and that he is, in this respect, a lapsed Protestant – and are we not to expect this from the proverbially hypocritical Puritan?<sup>201</sup>

These references also underscore Hamlet’s connection to Wittenberg. One of Shakespeare’s most conspicuous additions to the story as he received it is to cast the protagonist and his main confidant as university students, which is not the case in any other version of the Hamlet, and has been plausibly interpreted as one of the elements introduced

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<sup>199</sup> The allusion was first recognized by S. W. Singer, *The Text of Shakespeare Vindicated* (London, 1853), 266.

<sup>200</sup> For a more detailed argument, see my note “An Allusion to Purgatory in *Hamlet*”, *N&Q* 57 (2010): 379-80.

<sup>201</sup> We should also be wary of always trying to fit Hamlet’s words, or those of any other character – especially when they are made to carry such allusions – to a psychological rationale. As Kay Hoff notes, “A foolish speaker, one who does not perceive the double meanings of his own words, may be presented to a witty audience, members of which are alive to the foolish speaker’s unintended meanings” (*Hamlet’s Choice*, 84-5).

with university performances in mind.<sup>202</sup> Yet Hamlet and Horatio are not students of just any university: they are students of the University of Wittenberg, and Shakespeare makes sure the word is heard a sufficient number of times to get this point across (1.2.113-19, 164-8). It is therefore legitimate and indeed necessary to inquire what contemporary audiences would have made of this. Certainly Wittenberg was a word familiar to any educated person, and the city's image in non-fictional sources seems clear enough: besides the high reputation of its university, the city was famous for being the birthplace of Luther, the cradle of the Reformation, and a major centre of continental Protestantism.<sup>203</sup> Official opinion of Lutheranism seems to have been broadly irenic, if also critical in detail: there were significant divergences – notably in one of the principal shibboleths, the doctrine of the Eucharist – but these could be overlooked in the name of a broader Reformed unity.<sup>204</sup> For a prince of Denmark to study at the University of Wittenberg seems realistic in that Denmark was a Lutheran nation, and there are records of Danish students at the university in Shakespeare's day.<sup>205</sup>

The question to which there is still no wholly satisfactory answer, however, is what the mention of Wittenberg meant and connoted in English fiction, and on the English stage, of c.1600.<sup>206</sup> Here, apparently, a Wittenberg degree does not seem to have been in much esteem.

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<sup>202</sup> In addition to n. 191, and the various points noted by Reed, Nosworthy, and others, see the Latin university play *Hymenaeus*, performed at St. John's, Cambridge, in 1578, where the story as found in the play's source, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, is altered to make the protagonist a student, and to transfer the setting from Salerno to the university town of Padua; see *Hymenaeus*, ed. G. C. Moore Smith (Cambridge, 1908), xii.

<sup>203</sup> See, for example, the account in a 1600 travelogue by S. Lewkenor, quoted by Kastan, *Will*, 134-5.

<sup>204</sup> A good example is J. Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (London, 1583), 2: FFf4r: "if there haue bene any defect in Martin Luther: yet is that no cause why either the Papistes may greatly triu[m]ph, or why the Protestantes should despise Luther. For neither is the doctrine of Luther touchyng the Sacrame[n]t, so grosse that it maketh much with the Papistes: nor yet so discrepant fro[m] vs, that therfore he ought to be exploded. And though a full reconciliation of this difference ca[n] not well be made (as some haue gone about to do) yet let vs geue to Luther a moderate interpretation, & if we will not make thinges better, yet let vs not make them worse the[n] they be, & let vs beare, if not with the maner, yet at least with the tyme of his teachyng: and finally let it not be noted in vs, that we should seeme to differre in Charitie more (as Bucer sayd) then we do in doctrine"; the passage first appears in the 1570 edition.

<sup>205</sup> Apart, of course, from the obvious anachronism that it was founded in 1502, whereas the play's action nominally takes place at the time of the Danelaw.

<sup>206</sup> As already mentioned, an early case for Luther as Shakespeare's "prototype" for Hamlet was made by Waddington ("Lutheran Hamlet", 32-9), but even the most tangible points of resemblance he suggests are based on learned and sometimes modern, rather than popular and contemporary sources. The same goes for Oakes, arguing that "Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* to illuminate the issues set in motion by the Protestant Reformation and has even managed to adumbrate some key insights into Martin Luther's dilemma that arose only in the twentieth century", notably with E. Erikson's controversial 1958 biography *Young Man Luther* ("*Hamlet* and the Reformation", 54-7). The argument by S. H. Stein, "Hamlet in Melanchthon's Wittenberg",

Here the university's most famous alumnus was not Luther but Faustus, who learned many things there, but most of all how to summon demons and syllogise himself into damnation. Even more interesting, and apparently unnoticed in this respect, is Henry Chettle's *Tragedy of Hoffman*, where prince Jerome boasts: "True, I am no foole, I haue bin at *Wittenberg*, where wit growes."<sup>207</sup> This, however, is irony of the crudest sort, for as a theatre audience would already know, and as readers learn presently, Jerome is mentally disabled, and his father's greatest care is that "A witlesse foole must needs be *Prussias* heire".<sup>208</sup> Wittenberg also figures unflatteringly in Austen Saker's *Narbonus* – where, however, it is probably little more than a front for either or both of the English universities – and more significantly, Nashe's *Unfortvnate Traveller*, where it is definitely presented as Puritan.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, Wittenberg often appears indiscriminately coupled with Geneva and other centres of continental Protestantism, and even if some the allusions in *Hamlet* do have a specifically Lutheran background, it could be that its mention more readily connoted a general category, "continental Protestantism", and consequently, to many in the conformist and often xenophobic Church of England mainstream, "Puritanism".<sup>210</sup> Finally, the Puritan-Papist

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*N&Q* 56 (2009): 55-7, that the association with Wittenberg "suggests that Hamlet's unworldliness, *contemptus mundi*, and lack of interest in Denmark and in his princely responsibility represents the strange fruit of his higher education" is not very persuasive.

<sup>207</sup> [H. Chettle], *The Tragedy of Hoffman* (London, 1631), C1r.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. Chettle's career is contemporaneous with Shakespeare's, and *Hoffman*, first performed in 1602, is contemporary with *Hamlet*. Among other points of connection, Chettle and Shakespeare are among those believed to have had a hand in *The Tragedy of Sir Thomas More*, as first argued by R. Simpson, "Are There Any Extant MSS. in Shakespeare's Handwriting?", *N&Q*, o.s., 182 (1871): 1-3, and subsequently the contributors to *Shakespeare's Hand in the Play of "Sir Thomas More"*, ed. W. W. Greg (1923; repr. 2010).

<sup>209</sup> See A. Saker, *Narbonus* (London, 1580), D2r-E1r; T. Nashe, *The Vnfortvnate Traueller* (London, 1594), D4v-F2v: "At the verie point of our enterance into Wittenberg, wee were spectators of a verie solemne scolasticall entertainment of the Duke of Saxonie thether. Whome because he was the chiefe patrone of their vniuersitie, and had tooke *Luthers* parte in banishing the masse and all lyke papal iurisdiction out of their towne, they croucht vnto extreemly. [...] the heads of their vniuersitie, (they were great heads of certaintie) met him in their hooded hypocrisie and doctorly accoutrements, *secundum formam statuti* [...]. The next daie they had solempne disputations, where *Luther* and *Carolostadius* scolded leuell coile. A masse of words I wot well they heapt vp against the masse and the Pope, but father particulars of thir disputations I remember not. I thought verily they would haue worried one another with wordes, they were so earnest and vehement. *Luther* had the louder voice, *Carolostadius* went beyond him in beating his fists, *Quæ supra nos nihil ad nos*", etc. The empty vehemence of the disputants, and the "hooded hypocrisie" of the university dignitaries, are definite Puritan features, and are additionally recognizable as such here because they are also stressed in the virulently anti-Puritan excursus in the Münster Rebellion episode, which almost immediately precedes the description of Wittenberg. The anti-Puritanism is then complemented by the description of "the *Sodom of Italy*" (O4r), with the pope presented as a ruthless murderer and inveterate lecher.

<sup>210</sup> Nashe affords an excellent example of this animosity towards the "reformed forraine Churches"; "Ministers and pastors", Wilton admonishes, "sell awaie your sects and schismes to the decrepite Churches in contention beyond sea" (*Traueller*, D4v-E1r).

analogy would seem to be signalled by another element in the play, namely the deliberate contrast between Hamlet's Wittenberg and Laertes' Paris; the latter was a renowned centre of Catholic learning, and condemnation of the "Sorbonists" is a common refrain in English writings of the period.<sup>211</sup>

Thus at least the main contours of the play seem to corroborate the inference of a satirical allegorical subtext representing the submission of Chairbonne to Poisson – Puritan son to Papist father, the younger heresy to the older, Vice to devil – for the purpose of overthrowing the established regime. One complication, obviously, is the fact that Claudius, while lawfully the king, and insistent on his divine prerogative, is also guilty of murder – including that of the most heinous kind, fratricide – and incest. Much ink has been spilled on where Hamlet stands in this, and what is the answer to the question he himself explicitly poses:

Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon –  
 He that hath kill'd my king and whor'd my mother,  
 Popp'd in between th'election and my hopes,  
 Thrown out his angle for my proper life  
 And with such coz'nage – is't not perfect conscience  
 To quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damn'd  
 To let this canker of our nature come  
 In further evil? (5.2.63-70)

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<sup>211</sup> The only direct hint that Laertes' is in Paris for studies comes in Polonius' very last instruction to Reynaldo: "And let him ply his music" (2.1.72). However, Polonius' list of vices – Reynaldo is to find out whether Laertes might be "drinking, fencing, swearing,/ Quarreling, drabbing", whether he has been seen "gaming", "falling out at tennis", entering "a house of sale" –/ Videlicet a brothel", or indulging in other "such wanton, wild, and usual slips/ As are companions noted and most known/ To youth and liberty" (2.1.22-61) – is very similar to the descriptions of the debauched student, for example Saker's Narbonus at "Wittenberg": "now the Tennis courtes were claymed his possessions: the Dauncing schooles more deyntie for so louely delightes: the Theatres most gratefull for his gaynefull guest: [...] now the filthy lust of beastly *Pasiphae*, and then the vnsatiabie desire of baudy *Biblis*: [...] now the dycing houses retaine him, & then the Tauerns holde him: neuer godly disposed, but always wickedly minded" (*Narbonus*, D2v-4r). There is, furthermore, a curiously specific parallel between Polonius' "let him ply his music" and the fact that Narbonus neglected all other aspects of his studies, but "for lack of other exercises, and wa[n]ting other recreations, [...] practised the song Schole, and raught so high a note, but that he mistook sometime his Cliftes, gaue his notes wrong names: for sol, he sang souldes: for la, all, and for fa, forfayed" (E1r).

We may sympathise with Hamlet's plight – and clearly the idea is to make his case for revenge as tempting as possible – yet the correct answer is implicit in the very question: no, premeditated murder is not “perfect conscience”, least of all – according to established Church of England opinion, including James' views in *The Trve Lawe of Free Monarchies* – the murder of a monarch, however corrupt and tyrannical. In contrast to the Puritans and the Papists, who are both presented as arguing that the deposition and even killing of tyrants is lawful under the right circumstances, the conforming view allowed only patient tolerance or escape.<sup>212</sup>

In this perspective, Hamlet's revenge is patently unwarranted, and two circumstances are particularly damning. The first is his confession of his frustrated hopes in becoming the king himself. Even if his case was purely altruistic, it would still have not been valid, but this, as Hassel notes, is perfectly in tune with the stereotype of the Puritan, who, under the pretence of godly reform, seeks to seize power for himself. The second is Hamlet's appeal to the doctrine of the king's two bodies: “The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King is a thing [...] Of nothing” (4.2.26-9).<sup>213</sup> Although its roots lie in the medieval period, the consolidation of the doctrine came at the hand of sixteenth-century jurists, notably the influential, and staunchly Catholic, Edmund Plowden, who used it to provide a legal case for Mary Stuart's claim to the English throne.<sup>214</sup> Clearly Shakespeare was

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<sup>212</sup> See James VI/I, *Trve Lawe*, esp. B1r-C1v. The doctrine of passive obedience is well known and endless examples could be submitted. In the present context, however, it is worth pointing out that it figured very prominently in the attacks on the Puritan-Papist, especially in Owen's *Herod and Pilate*, where the Puritan-Papist agenda was explicitly related to regicide. See Owen, *Herod and Pilate*, ¶3v: “Our *Sauior Christ* (foreseeing and foreshewing, that his *Disciples* the chiefe pillars of the Church, should be brought before *Kings*, *hated of the world*, yea and put to *death* for his *names sake*,) teacheth not, to resist, or rebel, but to abide and endure, not with violence to withstand authoritie, but with *patience to possesse their soules* [Matt. 10:18, 10:23, 24:13; Luke 21:19]. This is remedie against Tyrants, and there is no other meanes reuealed in the word of God against persecution then *Desertion* [...]. Let no man therfore resist their power, which *God* ordained, but will all meekness endure persecution in earth, that they may be crowned in heauen.”

<sup>213</sup> The classic study of the doctrine is E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, 1957). Kantorowicz discussed Shakespeare's familiarity with the doctrine on the example of *Richard II* (24-41), but the reference in *Hamlet* was first recognized by J. Johnson, “The Concept of the ‘King's Two Bodies’ in *Hamlet*”, *SQ* 18 (1967): 430-4.

<sup>214</sup> *The Treatise of the two Bodies of the king, vis. natural and politic... The whole intending to prove the title of Mary Quene of Scotts to the succession of the crown of England* was never printed, but it circulated in manuscript, and served as a basis for further arguments; see M. Axton, “The Influence of Edmund Plowden's Succession Treatise”, *HLQ* 37 (1974): 209-26. Needless to say, James would have been closely familiar with all of this. Ironically, upon his accession Plowden's son presented him with a copy of his father's *Treatise*, which had contributed towards his mother's death, but now supported his own claim to the throne.

familiar with this to at least some degree, and Hamlet's "The king is a thing [...] / Of nothing" sounds like a parody of the paradoxical descriptions found in Plowden's work, describing the king's body politic as "a Body that cannot be seen or handled".<sup>215</sup> Subsequently, however, in an uncanny fulfilment of the darkest forebodings of the Puritan-Papist propaganda, the doctrine developed by Plowden in an attempt to restore England to Catholicism would serve as the conceptual background to the legal formulations employed to justify the deposition and execution of Charles I.<sup>216</sup>

### FROM HAMLET TO LAMETH

Thus the play so intimately associated with the Burckhardian idea of an increasingly secular early modernity, and the associated turn from allegory to realism, turns out to be thoroughly pervaded both by the religious concerns of the period, and by allegorical devices and figures which often hark back to the very dramatic traditions that Shakespeare is supposed to have left behind as he made the transition from *Everyman* to *Othello*. As if in a prescient mockery of this narrative, Shakespeare employs the allegorical structure of the stage for an episode of sinister farce, transforming the icon of modern consciousness to the buffoonish figure of the Vice, brandishing his dagger of lath and heaping crudely humorous abuse at the "fellow in the cellarage". In the back of Hamlet's thoughts, in what linguists would refer to as his conceptual metaphors – "pales and forts of reason", "though hell itself should gape" – we catch glimpses of the religious and allegorical drama that met its demise with the transformation of the London theatrical scene in the late 1570s. A certain Norman horseman shows up at Elsinore, praising Laertes' skill in fencing; the report makes Hamlet "envenom[ed] with envy", and anxious to put this to the test, which Claudius exploits to arrange the fatal duel (4.7.80-161). But what is the name of this horseman, whose gossip thus leads to the deaths of Hamlet,

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<sup>215</sup> Quoted in Kantorowicz, *Bodies*, 7

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 21: "Without those clarifying, if sometimes confusing, distinctions between the King's sempiternity and the king's temporariness, between his immaterial and immortal body politic and his material and mortal body natural, it would have been next to impossible for Parliament to resort to a similar fiction and summon, in the name and by the authority of Charles I, King body politic, the armies which were to fight the same Charles I, king body natural."

Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude? It is, most fittingly, Lamord, and it is not long before he returns to reap the harvest that he has so artfully sown: “this fell sergeant, Death”, says dying Hamlet to the pale and trembling Horatio, “is strict in his arrest” (5.2.341-2).<sup>217</sup>

There has been much discussion as to whether Shakespeare ever witnessed a performance of a mystery cycle, perhaps as a boy at nearby Coventry, whose cycle was suppressed in 1579.<sup>218</sup> Echoes in a number of plays, including *Hamlet* – for example, in Hamlet’s advice against overacting, which “o’erdo[es] Termagant” and “out-Herods Herod” (3.2.13-14) – make his familiarity with the mysteries virtually certain, but it seems to me that in accounting for these echoes too much emphasis has been placed on the procession-type cycles, performed at the Corpus Christi feast in particular towns. There were also mystery cycles that were not necessarily tied to any particular occasion or locale, were not staged as pageant processions but as theatre-in-the-round, and were adapted for touring. *The N-Town Play* is a case in point, and there seems no particular reason to discount the possibility of Shakespeare seeing such a cycle performed anywhere in England, and perhaps also at a date when many of the procession cycles had already been suppressed. That he did see a mystery cycle seems clear, and of whatever type it was, it may have, like *The N-Town Play*, contained a particular episode which may have made an impression on him.

The episode in question deals with Lamech, a minor figure who appears in the Book of Genesis, but who rose to considerable prominence in medieval and postmedieval legend, art, and drama.<sup>219</sup> The brief account of Lamech in Genesis 4:18-24 recounts his birth as a

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<sup>217</sup> Various details favour the Q2 reading “Lamord” over F’s “Lamound” (the passage is absent from Q1). Firstly, it is a horseman, which fits the traditional representation of death, as does the description of “this gallant” as “incorps’d and demi-natur’d” with his “brave beast”, and of his equestrian skills as having “witchcraft in’t”. Secondly, the reading “Lamord”, echoing *la mort*, is humourously played on in Laertes’ mention of the name: “Upon my life, Lamord.” Finally, the pun continues into the uncomprehendingly sardonic lines that follow: “*Laer.* Upon my life, Lamord./ *King.* The very same./ *Laer.* I know him well. He is the brooch indeed/ And gem of all the nations.” The representation of death as a sergeant performing an arrest was conventional, including the drama: see R. E. Pitts, “This Fell Sergeant, Death”, *SQ* 20 (1969): 486-91; M. Christopher Pecheux, “Another Note on ‘This Fell Sergeant, Death’”, *SQ* 26 (1975): 74-5; S. Viswanathan, “‘This Fell Sergeant, Death’ Once More”, *SQ* 29 (1978): 84-5.

<sup>218</sup> A long-debated issue regarding the Coventry cycle is whether or not it contained Old Testament material. The latest editors of the fragments still take no definitive stand on this issue: see *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. P. M. King and C. Davidson (Kalamazoo, 2000), 9.

<sup>219</sup> Besides the *The N-Town Play*, the episode is also found in the Cornish *Creation of the World*, and other plays from France, Germany, and Spain. The longest and most elaborate dramatic treatment of the Lamech story appeared as late as 1550, in the pageant-play *Adam und Heva* by the Swiss Jacob Ruf, and later still, in the early

sixth-generation descendant of Cain, his bigamous marriage and its progeny, and ends with a cryptic passage sometimes referred to as Lamech's "Song of the Sword", in which lie the origins of the legend which would eventually be performed in *The N-Town Play*:

And Lamech said vnto his wiues Ada and Sella: Heare my voice ye wyues of Lamech,  
hearken vnto my speache: for I haue slayne a man to the wounding of my selfe, & a  
young man to myne owne punishment.

If Cain shalbe auenged seuen folde, truely Lamech seuentie tymes & seuen  
tymes.

The passage, in this standard reading, has puzzled readers since ancient times.<sup>220</sup> Who are the two men? Why has Lamech killed them? What does he mean by the seventy-sevenfold vengeance? In order to provide answers to such questions, an apocryphal tradition on Lamech emerged, building on the cue provided by Lamech's final words, referring to God's decree that "whosoever slayeth Cain, he shalbe punished seuen folde" (Genesis 4:15). The adult man killed by Lamech, the interpreters concluded, was none other than his ancestor Cain. Other details of the biblical text were then construed in various ways which fit this central premise, ultimately giving rise to an elaborate account which may be summarized as follows: Lamech, in his prime the greatest of archers but now grown old and blind, refuses to stop hunting with his bow, employing a boy, sometimes identified as his son Tubalcain, to guide him and find him marks to shoot at; one day, the boy thinks he sees a beast in the bush and instructs Lamech to shoot at it; Lamech's arrow hits the mark, yet it turns out to be no beast but his

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seventeenth century, the subject was handled by the Spanish playwrights V. de Guevara and L. de Vega. See B. Murdoch, *The Medieval Popular Bible* (Cambridge, 2003), 70-95. Murdoch's claim that the medieval drama "only rarely allows Lamech onto the stage" (84) seems contradicted by the number, dispersion, date and nature of the works he himself references and discusses. It is, of course, on the surviving evidence that the judgment is based, and this evidence can be plausibly interpreted to support different conclusions; for example, the extensive dispersion of the motif, and the very late date of the works of Ruf and the Spanish playwrights, can be taken as evidence precisely of Lamech's rootedness in theatrical tradition.

<sup>220</sup> I quote from the Bishops' Bible. Similar readings are to be found in the Tyndale, Great Bible, Douay-Rheims, and King James versions, as well as in the Vulgate; in all of these, Lamech says to his wives that he has killed two men, an adult and a youth. The exception is the Geneva, reading "for I would slay a man in my wound, and a yong man in mine hurt". This is clearly based on Calvin's commentary on Genesis, where he rejects the Lamech legend – although not before first providing a synopsis – and urges a philological solution to the crux: "in my opinion their iudgment is true, which turne the Verbe of the preterperfect tense into the time to come or future tense, and vnderstande it indefinitely: as if he did boaste, that he was strong and violent enough, to kill the moste strong enimie. Therefore I reade the text after this manner, *I will kill a man, &c.*"; *A Commentarie of John Caluine, vpon the first booke of Moses called Genesis* (London, 1578), K5r-v.



outlawed ancestor Cain; realizing what has happened, Lamech beats the boy to death in a fit of rage and returns home to his wives, lamenting his fate. The appeal of the story is easy to perceive: not only does it account for the references to the two men in Genesis 4:23, but it has the added advantage of wrapping up the otherwise incomplete history of Cain.

The account first appeared in ancient biblical commentary and pseudepigrapha, whence it entered the mainstream of Christian tradition at least as early as Jerome. Jerome's Letter 36, in reply to pope Damasus' inquiry about several biblical passages including Genesis 4:15 (the sevenfold punishment pronounced on whoever kills Cain), does not contain an account of the actual shooting, but does take note of the tradition, encountered in a "certain Hebrew volume", that Cain was killed by Lamech.<sup>221</sup> Several further interpretations are surveyed: Cain's sevenfold punishment had to do either with Cain's seven sins, or the seven torments with which he was supposedly punished by God, or the seven generations between Adam and Cain's killer Lamech. By similar interpretive manoeuvres, the seventy-sevenfold punishment on Lamech is said to refer to the seventy-seven souls of Lamech's kin perished in the Flood, or the seventy-seven generations from Adam to Christ, who takes on himself the sins of all humanity (represented in the person of Lamech). These, however, are only some of the paths winding through what Jerome describes as "a vast forest of disputations" on the questions of Cain, Lamech, and their sevenfold and seventy-sevenfold vengeance or punishments. Origen, we learn in an off-hand comment, devoted two entire books of his lost commentary on Genesis to this subject, which long continued to exercise the imagination of Christian commentators.

It is with such interpretive underpinnings that the story of Lamech's shooting of Cain was later widely disseminated throughout medieval and post-medieval Europe. In spite of his marginal role in the biblical text itself, Lamech came to be known as an *exemplum* of rage and vengeance, repeating, with greatly magnified consequences, the sin of his accursed forefather, and thus assuming a place of considerable importance in Christian history, becoming indeed

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<sup>221</sup> *Lettres*, ed. J. Labourt (Paris, 1951), 2: 51–65.

“a crucial pivot in the whole salvific scheme”.<sup>222</sup> Eventually he makes it to *The N-Town Play*, where his portrayal is notable for the emphasis on his “raving” rage at his loss of sight.<sup>223</sup>

Lamech implores his boy to find him a mark to shoot at; the boy thinks he sees a beast in the bush, causing Lamech to kill Cain; enraged, Lamech kills the boy, calling him a “stynkyng lurdeyn”, and ends his part with a wail of despair. The widening cycle of wrath and vengeance is finally broken by the Flood. As Lamech departs from the stage, Noah returns to mourn its coming, even though it is just punishment “for synne of mannys wyldde mood”.

Did Shakespeare witness a performance like this one?<sup>224</sup> Did raving Lamech and his ill-fated slaying of Cain come to his mind when he wrote *Hamlet*? We can never know for sure, yet striking resemblances cannot be denied, and have been noted independently of the present discussion. Thus in 1957 J. A. Bryant, Jr., found Shakespeare’s play “strangely reminiscent of the legend”, specifically in Hamlet’s curious apology to Laertes, disclaiming any “purpos’d evil” in the killing of Polonius: “I have shot my arrow o’er the house/ And hurt my brother” (5.2.237-39).<sup>225</sup> Why arrow, when Polonius was killed with a sword? And is the unintended murder of Polonius, hiding behind the arras, not reminiscent of Lamech’s unintended shooting of Cain, hiding behind the bush? There was no decisive evidence, Bryant thought, for conscious allusion on Shakespeare’s part, yet

the consonance of that legend with *Hamlet* as regards the spread of sin, the blindness that precipitates the catastrophe, and the catastrophe that purges is a further indication of the general background against which Shakespeare wrote his play. Like Lamech, Hamlet sees the errors of his own blindness as spreading the corruption which will end in a bloody catastrophe.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> H. O’Donoghue, “What Has Baldr to Do with Lamech?”, *Medium Ævum* 72 (2003): 82-107, p. 97.

<sup>223</sup> See *The N-Town Play*, ed. S. Spector (Oxford, 1991), 1: 45: “Gret mornynge I make and gret cause I haeue!/ Alas, now I se not: for age I am blynde./ Blyndenes doth make me of wytt for to rave;/ Whantynge of eyesyght in peyn doth me bynde!”

<sup>224</sup> See M. O’Connell, “*King Lear* and the Summons of Death”, in *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, ed. Perry and Watkins, arguing that there are echoes in Shakespeare’s plays, including *Hamlet*, of a Cain and Abel episode (201). This would be commonly followed by one on Noah and the Flood, into which, as in *The N-Town Play*, a dramatization of Lamech’s killing of Cain was sometimes inserted.

<sup>225</sup> *Hippolyta’s View* (Kentucky, 1961), 134–5.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

Bryant overlooked, however, far more specific and important analogies, notably that between Lamech's killing of his fratricidal great-great-great-grandfather Cain, and Hamlet's killing of his fratricidal uncle Claudius, whom the play twice explicitly relates to Cain.<sup>227</sup> He also overlooked the legend's specific connections to the topics of revenge and murder. God's injunction against the killing of Cain was seen as the archetype of God's injunction against taking justice into one's own hands. Violating this injunction, the interpreters claimed, Lamech does the same thing as Hamlet: he takes justice into his own hands rather than leaving it to God.<sup>228</sup> The fruit of vengeance is more vengeance. Hamlet's vengeance on Claudius not only claims several collateral victims, but also leads to Laertes' vengeance on Hamlet. Ultimately, the toll turns from sevenfold to seventy-sevenfold. In the frenzied words of Laertes, about to leap, with sinister symbolism, into his sister's grave:

O, treble woe  
 Fall ten times treble on that cursèd head  
 Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense  
 Deprived thee of! (5.1.242-5)

Cain's crime leads to Lamech's, Lamech's to the Flood. Claudius' leads to Hamlet's, Hamlet's to the bloodbath in the hall of Elsinore.

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<sup>227</sup> See Claudius's mention of "the first corpse" (1.2.105), and his admission that his crime "hath the primal eldest curse upon't,/ A brother's murder" (3.3.36-8). The story of Cain also pervades the gravediggers scene: one of the clowns boasts of being an heir to "Adam's profession" (5.1.31), while Hamlet remarks that this same "knave" treats a human skull "as if 'twere Cain's jawbone, that did the first murder" (5.1.76-7). To these are perhaps to be added Hamlet's lines at 1.2.256-7: informed of the apparition in the likeness of his father, the prince jumps to the conclusion that it is his "father's spirit, in arms", adding that "Foul deeds will rise,/ Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes". This seems distinctly evocative of God's admonishment of Cain at Genesis 4:10, especially in the Geneva translation, the only contemporary version which gives "earth" rather than "ground" in this passage: "What hast thou done? the voyce of thy brothers blood cryeth vnto me from the earth".

<sup>228</sup> For an instance of Lamech as an example of unfruitful and un-Christian punishment, see J. Yonge, *The Gouvernaunce of Prynces*, in *Three Prose Versions of the "Secreta Secretorum"*, ed. R. Steele (London, 1898), 167. Such references make it clear that it would be beside the point to object that Lamech was blind and thus not responsible for shooting Cain. In the Christian reading, Lamech's physical blindness could either be understood as a spiritual one, or submitted to wider-ranging typological, allegorical, etymological, and numerological interpretations, or dealt with in more straightforward ethical and legal terms. A good example of the latter is Lamech's appearance in the treatment of accidental killing in Aquinas, where the story is attributed scriptural authority, and is used as proof for the argument that manslaughter, if due to negligence, is in fact murder; see *The "Summa Theologica"* (London, 1929), 10: 211-12. This remained the view of Protestant theologians: Calvin, for example, insists that "He hathe not therfore escaped the crime of manslaughter, that he hathe kepte him selfe from shedinge of blode. If thou commite any thinge in dede, if thou go about any thinge with endeouore, if thou conceiue any thyng in desire and purpose that ys against the safetie of an other, thou art holden gilty of manslaughter"; J. Calvin, *The Institvtion of Christian Religion* (London, 1561), H3r.

Who, then, is Hamlet, the killer of his fratricidal kinsman, if not Lamech? The biblical archetype hovers above him as he thrusts the rapier at the rat behind the arras – “This bad begins, and worse remains behind” (3.4.181) – and when he finally fulfils the apparition’s bidding, pouring the poisoned wine down the fratricide’s throat, his transformation is complete. Out of the brave new world of particular named people, he steps back into the shadowy realm of archetypes and allegories. Indeed, the very letters that comprise his name, the principal token of his personal identity, begin to flicker and trade places. For to Shakespeare and his contemporaries, Lamech was not only Lamech. He also had another name, the name under which he raves and murders in *The N-Town Play* and many other medieval and postmedieval English texts, including some contemporary with Shakespeare’s play. The name was Lameth. And like Ariosto’s tyrant, who of a jealous man became Jealousy itself, we see Hamlet evacuated of his fabled interiority, banished from his prophetic modernity, anagrammatized into an ancient biblical *exemplum* of the unlawfulness of revenge, dissolved into Lameth.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Semantically motivated names appear elsewhere in Shakespeare, and two examples of anagrammatic derivation, both Shakespeare’s creations, are Caliban in *The Tempest* and Asnath in *2 Henry VI* (thus Q; F’s “Asmath” is clearly incorrect). The anagrammatic correspondence between “Hamlet” and “Lameth” may have been suggested by the previous shift from Belleforest’s “Amleth” to “Hamlet” of the *Ur-Hamlet*. For further discussion of the Hamlet-Lameth connection, see my article “Hamlet and Lameth”, *N&Q* 58 (2011): 247-54. The form “Lameth” for the name of either or both of the biblical Lamechs – the other, a descendant of Seth appears at Gen 5:28–31 and 1 Chron 1:3 – is found in various English texts until the end of the sixteenth century, both Latin and vernacular. It may have originally arisen for the purpose of distinguishing between the two figures. It seems to have been common in Middle English and is employed in diverse works ranging from translations and paraphrases of the Bible to Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. Although these works are all originally in manuscript, some of them, along with “Lameth”, survived into print. *The Canterbury Tales* are a notable case in point: “Lameth” is retained in Caxton’s editions and is still there, more than a century later, in Speght’s *Workes* of 1598. It also appears in at least some originally sixteenth-century English works: for example, it is found in Tyndale’s New Testament (Luke 3:36), and in both the Old (1 Chronicles 1:3) and the New Testament (Luke 3:36) of the Great Bible, the first publicly read English Bible, which went through a number of editions between 1539 and 1569. In subsequent translations the form was uniformly replaced by “Lamech”, which certainly contributed to its standardization elsewhere, but it still survives in a significant number of sixteenth and early seventeenth-century English texts. In addition to examples noted in the *N&Q* article (n. 24-6), see J. Legrand, [*The book of good maners*] ([Westminster, 1487]), K3v; Christine de Pisan, [*The boke of the fayt of armes and of Chyualrye*] ([Westminster, 1489]), O5v; Erasmus of Rotterdam, *The first tome or volume of the Paraphrase... vpon the newe testamente* (London, 1548), F5r (paraphrase on Luke, separately paginated); T. Paynell, *The pa[n]dictes of the Euangelycall Lawe* (London, 1553), D1r; G. Boccaccio, *The tragedies* (London, [1554?]), A5v; P. Mexia, *The foreste or Collection of Histories* (London, 1571), E3v; M. Cop, *A godly and learned exposition vpon the Prouerbes of Solomon* (London, 1580), Kkkk3r; D. Lindsay, *The warkis* ([Edinburgh, 1582]), C8v; Godfridus, *The Knowledge of Thinges vnknowne* (London, 1585), A7v; R. Vennard, *The Right Way to Heaven* (London, 1601), C1r; G. Leyburn, *Holy Characters* (Douai, 1662), R6r; R. B[rathwaite], *A Comment Upon the Two Tales of... S<sup>r</sup> Jeffray Chavcer* (London, 1665), F1v; R. Pecock, *A Treatise Proving Scripture To be the Rule of Faith* (London, 1688), H3r. For examples of usage in Dutch and French, see Brljak, “Hamlet and Lameth”, 253, n. 25.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**ALLEGORY AND EPIC**

Have I spoken something, have I uttered something, worthy of God? No, I feel that all I have done is to wish to speak; if I did say something, it is not what I wanted to say. How do I know this? Simply because God is unspeakable. But what I have spoken would not have been spoken if it were unspeakable. For this reason God should not even be called unspeakable, because even when this word is spoken, something is spoken. There is a kind of conflict between words here: if what cannot be spoken is unspeakable, then it is not unspeakable, because it can actually be said to be unspeakable. It is better to evade this verbal conflict silently than to quell it disputatiously.

– Augustine of Hippo<sup>1</sup>

Belief in scripture is disbelief in scripture. This is what Augustine wants evaded in silence, for quelling it disputatiously would mean to bring to light the paradox at the heart not only of his own faith, but any religion of the book. Frozen in their canonical forms and stranded in futures undreamt of by those who wrote them, sacred texts cannot be believed in, not in any simple sense. Genuine, literal belief in the shape-shifting monsters of classical myth leads just as inexorably to atheism as does genuine, literal belief in the anthropomorphic deity of the Old Testament. In the long run, what is required is not belief, but increasingly sophisticated modes of strategic, selective disbelief, ranging from the *via negativa* exemplified by Augustine's passage, in which the hermeneutic process grinds to a halt, and the exegete lays down his pen to contemplate his inability to contemplate the divine, to the *via positiva* that has wearied the flesh of untold commentators, and of commentators on those commentators. The purpose, however, remains the same: unspeaking the speakable, harnessing the volatile power of the text into the service of an interpretive community whose authority nominally arises from that text, but in reality proceeds precisely from its methodical suppression.

Throughout the history of Western hermeneutics one encounters, especially in polemical contexts, aporetic moments similar to Augustine's conundrum, in which the hidden kinship of all scriptural religion, its common hermeneutical DNA, suddenly erupts into the foreground. Two centuries before Augustine, for example, we find the Assyrian apostate

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<sup>1</sup> *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. R. P. H. Green (Oxford, 1995), 17.

Tatian imploring the Greeks to stop allegorizing their gods, and preserving, in the process, a rare testimony of the work of Metrodorus of Lampsacus, a shadowy pre-Socratic figure from the fifth century BC, said to be a disciple of Anaxagoras:

The arguments of Metrodorus of Lampsacus, who turns everything into allegory in his work *On Homer*, are totally absurd; for he says that Hera or Athena or Zeus are not what their believers say, who made shrines and temples for them, but that they are natural substances and arrangements of elements. No doubt you will go on to say that Hector and Achilles and Agamemnon, and indeed all the Greeks and foreigners together with Helen and Paris, are entities of the same nature and were put into the poem for the sake of the composition, not because any of these human beings ever existed.<sup>2</sup>

But why should a Christian advise the pagans *not* to allegorize their gods? “Mind now what I say, men of Greece: do not allegorize either your stories or your gods, for if you try to do so your conception of divinity is subverted not only by us but also by yourselves.” If Tatian really believes what he is saying, should he not in fact be inciting the Greeks to allegorize their gods, thus precipitating their imminent downfall? But of course he does not. The real reason why Tatian does not want the Greeks to allegorize their gods is that he knows, at least on an intuitive level, that any text-based divinity, his or theirs, can survive only in the gap between the speakable and the unspeakable, and that a faith in scripture is really a faith in the inadequacy of scripture. He does not want the pagans to follow the example of Metrodorus precisely because this is the only way in which their gods might be rescued from the textual death-traps in which they increasingly found themselves imprisoned.

And vice versa, as illustrated by the anti-Christian treatise of the pagan monotheist Celsus, which was written around the same time as Tatian’s oration, but which must have stuck in the throats of his adversaries if Origen was commissioned to answer it some three

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<sup>2</sup> Tatian, “*Oratio ad Graecos*”, ed. M. Whittaker (Oxford, 1982), 43. On Metrodorus, see D. J. Califf, “Metrodorus of Lampsacus and the Problem of Allegory”, *Arethusa* 36 (2003): 21-36.

quarters of a century later.<sup>3</sup> Just as Tatian compiles a catalogue of the various perceived absurdities of Greek myth, so Celsus berates the crudely anthropomorphic deity and other indiscretions of Judeo-Christian scripture, which “*the more reasonable Jews and Christians are ashamed of [...] and try somehow to allegorize them*”.<sup>4</sup> Just as Tatian dismisses the pagan allegories, so Celsus dismisses those of the Christians, setting himself up for a predictable riposte from Origen, who naturally does not miss the opportunity to turn the accusations back on the accuser.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, however, the Christian ventures a dangerous comment: “when people read the theogonies of the Greeks”, writes Origen, “they make them sacred by allegories”.<sup>6</sup> They *make* them sacred. This is the lesson Christianity learned from its pagan adversaries: it is not the text, as such, that is sacred, it has to be *made* sacred by its interpretation. And if Hesiod can be made sacred in this way, why not Moses? “Are the Greeks alone allowed to find philosophical truths in a hidden form, and the Egyptians too, and all barbarians whose pride is in mysteries and in the truth which they contain? And do you think that the Jews alone [...] are the most stupid of all men?”<sup>7</sup>

Origen’s successors further consolidated and defended Christian hermeneutics, first from the pagan exegetes from whom they inherited it, then from Christian heretics, and finally from competing tendencies within the pale of Christian orthodoxy itself. For centuries to come, the church successfully harnessed the power of the sacred text. It restricted access to what was a forbiddingly expensive book in a foreign language readable only by the beneficiaries of a church-governed education, and it supervised its interpretation through

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<sup>3</sup> Celsus’ work is known only from extensive quotations in Origen’s refutation, and are here quoted from Origen, *Contra Celsum*, ed. H. Chadwick (1963; repr. Cambridge, 2003). For an attempt at a reconstruction of Celsus’ work, see Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, ed. R. J. Hoffman (Oxford, 1987); for a discussion of Celsus’ views in the context of pagan monotheism, A. Fürst, “Monotheism between Cult and Politics”, in *One God*, ed. S. Mitchell and P. Van Nuffelen (Cambridge, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 4.48.

<sup>5</sup> According to Celsus, Christian writings “*are incapable of being interpreted allegorically*”; “*the more reasonable Jew and Christians try somehow to allegorize them, but they are incapable of being explained in this way, and are manifestly very stupid fables*”; “*At any rate, the allegories which seem to have been written about them are far more shameful and preposterous than the myths, since they connect with some amazing and utterly senseless folly ideas which cannot by any means be made to fit*”; Judeo-Christian prophets produce “*incomprehensible, incoherent, and utterly obscure utterances, the meaning of which no intelligent person could discover; for they are meaningless and nonsensical, and give a chance for any fool or sorcerer to take the words in whatever sense he likes*” (ibid., 4.49-51, 7.9).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 4.42.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 4.38.



elaborate protocols of hermeneutical maintenance in which allegoresis played a central role. But what happens when this process is reversed? What happens when the theological apparatus of a former age crumbles, and the text suddenly awakes from its thousand-year slumber? And what happens when a poet, singularly equipped and positioned for such an undertaking, takes it upon himself to translate a highly advanced scriptural religion back into the narrative myth from which it had originally been abstracted?

What, in other words, happens in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the poem which attempts nothing less than a comprehensive rewriting of sacred history, and in which the concerns central to this study surface in acute and particularly revealing forms? It is hard to think of a work which has been so closely related to competing narratives of literary and intellectual modernity, and yet whose representational mode has been so radically contested, and whose critics labour in such punishing conditions, differing, as Waldock observed long ago, "not only in their approach to the poem, in their feeling about it, in their judgment of it: they differ also in their understanding of what occurs in it".<sup>8</sup> One thing that is certain, however, and is now both more widely recognized and more openly disputed than in Waldock's day, is that any answer to this question crucially depends on one's view of the status of allegorical representation, or absence thereof, in the poem. Indeed, the problem of what happens in *Paradise Lost* largely *is* the problem of whether the poem is to be understood as thoroughly allegorical in its representational mode, as thoroughly non- or even anti-allegorical, or as suspended, consciously or unconsciously, coherently or incoherently, between these two opposing poles – positions which all find representatives in the long history of the poem's reception, especially since the rise of scholarly interest in allegory in the second half of the twentieth century. If the scholarship produced in the decades which divide us from Waldock supersedes earlier discussions of these questions, and gives us a much better idea of what is at stake in posing them, it is still far from offering a definite or even a broadly accepted answer to the "deceptively simple" yet "obviously fundamental" question that he

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<sup>8</sup> A. J. A. Waldock, *"Paradise Lost" and Its Critics* (Cambridge, 1947), unpaginated Preface.

attempted to settle – “the question of what, at this important juncture or that, is really *happening* in the poem”.

Furthermore, answers to this question have inevitably implied, and are often explicitly premised on, specific configurations of the allegory-modernity nexus. In asking whether or not, and to what extent, and in what sense precisely, *Paradise Lost* is an allegorical poem, critics have also been asking questions about the dynamics of broader currents in intellectual and literary history. Most importantly in the present context, and affording the most tangible and suggestive opportunities for analysis, *Paradise Lost* has often been seen as a turning point in the history of the epic poem, and specifically in the tradition of the Renaissance allegorical epic, even though critics have been unable to agree on what sort of turning point it is. Is Milton to be located at the end of this tradition, and of the Renaissance more generally – a notion dating back at least to Voltaire and his view of Milton as “the last in *Europe* who wrote an *Epick Poem*”, and awkwardly enshrined in our literary histories, where the Renaissance reaches uncomfortably deep into the seventeenth century to claim *Paradise Lost* as its last masterpiece?<sup>9</sup> Or does *Paradise Lost* represent an epochal break with tradition, aligning it with the age to come, as it does in Larson’s early case for Milton’s modernity, or more recently, and with marked differences in conception and emphasis, Allen’s, Murrin’s, Fallon’s, or Teskey’s.<sup>10</sup> Still more recently, however, a number of critics – notably, Treip, Martin, Borris, Anderson – have reaffirmed the canonical periodisation, presenting Milton as the last major exponent of the Renaissance allegorical epic, and arguing for comprehensive allegorical readings of his work.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Voltaire, *An Essay upon the Civil Wars of France... And Also upon the Epick Poetry of the European Nations* (London, 1727), 102. Voltaire clarifies that he is excluding “all those whose Attempts have been unsuccessful, my Intention here being not to descant on the many who have contended for the Prize, but to speak only of the very few who have gain’d it in their respective Countries” – a view premised on Voltaire’s hostility towards the excessive use of allegory, and consciously calculated, as will become clearer below, to deny this prestigious title to works proceeding from the second wind of neoclassical allegorical epic in the wake of Le Bossu’s treatise of 1674. For a good discussion of Milton and periodisation, see J. Lynch, “Betwixt Two Ages Cast”, *JHI* 61 (2000): 397-413.

<sup>10</sup> See M. A. Larson, *The Modernity of Milton* (Chicago, 1927); D. C. Allen, *Mysteriously Meant* (Baltimore, 1970), 289-301 (correcting Allen’s earlier views in “Milton and the Descent to Light”, *JEGP* 60 [1961]: 614-30); M. Murrin, *The Allegorical Epic* (Chicago, 1980), 153-71; S. M. Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers* (Ithaca, 1991), esp. 137-93; G. Teskey, *Delirious Milton* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006), esp. 129-47.

<sup>11</sup> See M. A. Treip, *Allegorical Poetics and the Epic* (Lexington, 1994); C. G. Martin, *The Ruins of Allegory* (Durham, N. C., 1998); Borris, *Allegory and Epic*; J. H. Anderson, *Reading the Allegorical Intertext* (New York,

The present study does not pretend to take a disinterested view of these developments. I believe that the literalists are largely right, and that the allegorists, although they have done much to bring these concerns to the foreground of Milton studies, are largely wrong. Intervening directly into this debate, however, and responding adequately to the wide range of specific interpretive questions it raises, is beyond the compass of a single chapter, and is at any rate ancillary to the primary interests of this study. What can be done here – and what, given the current critical impasse, is perhaps even a priority – is to re-examine the grounds on which these debates have been waged, and see how they contribute to our understanding of the allegory-modernity dynamics in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English literature and the history of its reception. All engagements with specific interpretive issues on my own part are thus ancillary to this primary aim, and even though I presuppose throughout a non-allegorical approach to the poem, and provide an outline of such an approach in the first two sections of the chapter, I do this primarily in order to give some indication of the scope and parameters of the debate.

The chapter also hopes to demonstrate the exceptional interest that Milton's work holds within this purview. This is partly due to the peculiar and fragile intellectual formations of the mid-seventeenth century that provided the narrow window of opportunity for this work to come into being. Yet if it is increasingly recognized just how narrow this window was, it should also be recognized that it could easily have come and gone without leaving behind a supreme poetic expression had it not met with so singularly apposite a figure as Milton. Into the abyss where Augustine and others dared not look, Milton hurled himself with the same desperate resolve with which his Satan launches into the uncharted wilderness of chaos, and there, old, blind, and reviled, floating among the thousand systems, he was shown the secrets of the hoary deep. The great hermeneutical anchors of the world, encrusted with centuries of commentaries and glosses, were lifting from their ancient beds. The dark materials of

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2008). There is an early dissertation on the subject which I have not been able to see: R. W. Condee, "Milton's Theories concerning Epic Poetry", diss. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1949.

narrative myth, once safely constrained into theological service, longed to return to their primal state. “For a brief and exciting period, reality was up for grabs.”<sup>12</sup>

## OR FLOCKS, OR HEARDS, OR HUMAN FACE DIVINE

Discussions of the representational mode of *Paradise Lost* have touched on practically all aspects of the poem, yet in relation to the subject of perceived allegory in the work four major centres of attention can be discerned. The first and most obvious is comprised by the four passages of extended “personification allegory” in Books 2 and 10: Sin and Death (2.648-927, 10.229-414, 10.585-613), and the pavilion of Chaos (2.959-1009).<sup>13</sup> Secondly, there are the supernatural beings: God, Christ, angels, devils, and the monsters inhabiting hell. Except for the last, all of these are present throughout the poem, and their representations, especially the war in heaven, have been approached by many critics as “allegorical” in nature. Thirdly, there is Milton’s cosmology, notably the descriptions of the four principal cosmological realms of heaven, chaos, hell, and cosmos, as well as a number of minor or adjunct domains such as the structure leading up to the portal of heaven, the radiant sea or lake said to be positioned under it, and so on – again, some or all of this has been taken as partly or wholly “allegorical”.<sup>14</sup> Finally, there are more or less isolated episodes and motifs where allegory has

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<sup>12</sup> Fallon, *Philosophers*, 138.

<sup>13</sup> *Paradise Lost* is cited from B. K. Lewalski’s edition (Oxford, 2007), *De doctrina Christiana*, *Paradise Regain’d* and the shorter poems from *OW*, the English prose from *YP*, and other Latin prose from *CW*. For further details, see Conventions and Abbreviations.

<sup>14</sup> For an extensive review of the scholarship on the cosmology of *Paradise Lost*, see J. Leonard, *Faithful Labourers* (Oxford, 2013), 705-819. I deliberately omit the mention of the Paradise of Fools, often noted as one of the prime instances of “allegory” in the poem, because I agree with Martin, followed by Leonard, that there is “a figurative gap between this domain and the real cosmos” of the epic; see C. Gimelli Martin, “Milton’s Epistemology, Cosmology, and Paradise of Fools Reconsidered”, *MP* 99 (2001): 231-65, p. 258; cf. Leonard, *Labourers*, 716. Other instances of perceived cosmological allegory in *Paradise Lost* are more complex, carefully balancing between mimetic action and diegetic, rhetorical overlay, but the Paradise of Fools is emptied of mimesis altogether – a satirical elaboration of a joke so simple, that it is probably this simplicity that has rendered it invisible to most critics. This “*Limbo* large and broad” is “since calld/ The Paradise of Fools” (3.495-6), not because fools go there, but because fools *believe in it*. We do not need to speculate on what kind of a limbo it is, or whether it is literal or allegorical, because Milton did not and never would have placed any limbo, anywhere – not as the dualist of his younger days, much less so as the monist mortalist of his maturity. The expression denotes precisely something unreal – “A state of illusory happiness or good fortune; enjoyment based on false hopes or anticipations” (*OED*, *fool’s paradise*, 1) – and is thus, in a Protestant context, very aptly applied to purgatory. For some contemporary instances, see [E. Gayton], *Wit Revived* (London, [1655]), B5v; *A Humble Representation of the Sad Condition Of many of the Kings Party* ([London], 1661), A2v; J. Spencer, *A*

been presumed, often involving references or allusions to episodes in classical myth and epic to which allegorical meanings were traditionally attached.

The most ambitious allegorical readings of the poem have sought to encompass all these and still further elements in the poem. Treip, for example, also finds allegory in certain aspects of the portrayal of Adam and Eve, and according to her count between one fifth and the “bulk” of *Paradise Lost* is allegorical in mode, whether it is “direct allegory or semi-allegory or near-allegory in verbal device, or [...] allegorical figuration in the broadest senses”.<sup>15</sup> Still more comprehensive is the reading of Borris, who, in addition to all of the above, also finds in the poem a “general diffuse allegorism” whereby its “analogical cosmos and complementary heroic ecclesiology” signify the trans-spatial and trans-temporal community of Christ’s mystical church, and even more expansively, God himself, signified by the “godly allegorism” of universal correspondences and sympathies embedded in his creation, a “cosmic allegoresis” emerging from “the rapport of all its constituents as divinely authorized signs expressively participating in divine being and creativity, and collectively indicating their source”.<sup>16</sup>

The common starting point for these allegorical readings is the same as with all other works submitted to such readings: the feeling that, if taken only in its literal sense, the work

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*Discourse Concerning Prodigies* (Cambridge, 1663), E1r. Furthermore, it has not yet been noted that Milton’s passage is in part a reply to the passage on limbo in S. Pordage’s *Mundorum explicatio* (London, 1661), P6r-Q1r, which seeks to reaffirm the existence of an intermediate state in the afterlife, although he dismisses the Roman Catholic purgatory as a Satanic perversion of its true nature: “By Rome’s false *Limbo*, doth true *LIMBO* fall.” Thus Pordage’s angel tells the poem’s protagonist, named Pilgrim, of this true limbo and of souls “yonder up and down [...] wandering” (cf. Milton’s Satan “Walk[ing] up and down alone” [3.441] in the yet unpopulated limbo); describes how the journey of unprepared souls to heaven is interrupted when “*Parca* assunder cut their vital thread:/ Their parted souls then to this Region flew” (cf. the souls of Milton’s friars, who “Of Heav’ns ascent [...] lift thir Feet, when loe/ A violent cross wind from either Coast/ Blows them transverse ten thousand Leagues awry”, and they “Fly” into the limbo “o’re the backside of the World farr off” [3.486-94]); and asks “what shall those *Pilgrim*’s do,/ Who in Heav’ns Way have gone”, but are not yet “fit for *Paradise*: What then?/ Must they be hurled to the *Stygian* Den?” (cf. Milton’s sarcastic agreement that “Here Pilgrims roam, that stray’d so farr to seek/ In *Golgotha* him dead, who lives in Heav’n” [3.476-7]). A few pages earlier, Pordage also uses the phrase “paradise of fools” – “This is the state which *Reason*’s foolish Schooles/ Do nominate the *Paradise of Fools*” (*Explicatio*, P1v) – possibly lifting the rhyme from Harington’s epigram “Against *Paulus*”: “Theise writers that still sauour of the schools/ Frame to themselves a *Paradise of fooles*” (*Letters*, 170). Raymond’s discussion of Pordage in *Milton’s Angels* (Oxford, 2010), 137-47, does not touch on these matters. On other sources for Milton’s satire, see J. Wooten, “From Purgatory to the Paradise of Fools”, *ELH* 49 (1982): 741-50.

<sup>15</sup> Treip, *Poetics*, 126-7.

<sup>16</sup> Borris, *Allegory*, 189-90. The problems with such an approach, conflating theological doctrines or worldviews which may be particularly germane to allegorical expression with that expression itself, are briefly discussed below, p. 266-7. See also Borris’ “Allegory in *Paradise Lost*”, *MS* 26 (1991): 103-33, and ““Union of Mind””, *MS* 31 (1995): 45-72. Milton discusses the concept of the mystical church in *De doctrina*, 1.24.

violates the norms of serious imaginative literature, whether in theological, moral, or more importantly in the case of Milton's modern readers, ontological terms.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, because such passages typically do not appear in isolation from the main action of Milton's poem, the representational mode of the so-called allegorical episodes inevitably spreads to the rest of the poem. If we take Sin and Death to be allegorical, then it would appear that Satan, if he is able to interact with them, must also be allegorical; but then Satan also interacts with other angels, fallen and unfallen, so they must be allegorical as well; but then both Satan and the good angels converse with Adam and Eve, and so on, down to the last allegorical blade of allegorical grass in the allegorical paradise. In a work as tightly knit as *Paradise Lost*, a work which continuously stages complex interactions between its human and non-human characters, and repeatedly juxtaposes ostensibly fantastic with ostensibly verisimilar events, episodes cannot be safely quarantined from the whole, and any distinction between intermittent and continuous allegory becomes impossible to maintain.

What is really at stake is thus the imaginative unity of Milton's poem. Either, Treip writes, the literally implausible elements "belong within some total artistic conception which Milton entertained of his poem as a special kind of poetry and epic, or else *Paradise Lost* is a very bad poem and *epos* indeed".<sup>18</sup> For this very same reason, however, other critics – Teskey, for example – have insisted on a radically literal reading.<sup>19</sup> The same episode is

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<sup>17</sup> See Treip, *Poetics*, 129, 133-4: allegorical interpretations of *Paradise Lost* are invited by "passages of pure fantasy, *meraviglie*, supernatural actions not coated with 'verisimilitude' but conspicuously otherwise"; "Seeming 'irrelevance', 'absurdity', riddle, grotesqueness, bizarre or unexpected shifts in mode [...] are the signals by which allegory has always disclosed its hidden presence. [...] By such devices we can recognise the presence of hidden meanings in *Paradise Lost*". As further discussed in the Afterword, the positions of many modern critics are complicated by the fact that, even as they seek to unearth allegorical meaning in Milton's poem, they are also, inescapably, heirs to the contrary, post-Romantic impulse, which sees allegory as an affront to the imagination. Thus between the two passages cited above, Treip writes that Milton subscribed to a poetics according to which allegorical poetry must retain "the literal integrity of the main narrative line of the fiction", and "sustain credibility in the sequence of probable causation or links between events, as well as in the particulars of the human psychology and actions". There is an obvious and irreducible contradiction here: if the literal sense is sustained, credible and probable, then how can it at the same time be "conspicuously otherwise", and thus invite allegorical readings?

<sup>18</sup> Treip, *Poetics*, 127-8.

<sup>19</sup> "Sin's lacerated entrails and Death's vast, seeking nostril", writes Teskey, "resist any idealization as meaning. But they produce the effect that Milton intended: to force open the rift between the material and ideal until the ideal disappears altogether, overwhelmed by the exudations of substance – of blood and guts, of chaotic slime and rotting flesh – that rise through the crack. Milton intends to destroy in this manner any possibility of his poem's being interpreted allegorically. He does so by pressing to extremes the violent physicality that had been dialectically awakened in his great allegorical forebears, Spenser in particular. In so doing, Milton frees Sin

interpreted in two radically incompatible ways, yet for what is, in the final analysis, the same reason: radical allegorists and radical literalists both seek to uphold the total imaginative integrity of Milton's poem. Neither position, however, is wholly satisfactory. As discussed at length below, evidence of various kinds is overwhelmingly against the comprehensively allegorical readings by Treip, Borris and others. On the other hand, Teskey's view, anticipated by Voltaire's comments of the 1720s, is persuasive in its broad outlines but deficient in detail.<sup>20</sup> Extremely violent and physical personifications are found at least as early as Prudentius, and Milton's Sin is not in this respect greatly, if at all, superior to its partial model in Spenser's *Errour*, yet no one would argue that this makes it impossible for us to read the *Psychomachia* or *The Faerie Queene* as allegorical poems.<sup>21</sup>

More importantly, however, it also needs to be asked whether an entirely coherent reading of the poem is desirable or even possible, a question additionally relevant in the wake of the recent call for a "New Milton Criticism" programmatically opposed to this imperative.<sup>22</sup> Are we justified in seeking such complete coherence in *Paradise Lost*, or are we projecting onto the poem modern notions and ideals that are simply alien to it? Empirical evidence is inconclusive here: we meet with no record of a representative allegorical reading until well into the eighteenth century, but we also meet with no objection to Milton's

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and Death to become daemonic beings (of the kind he knew from the pre-classical, archaic worldview of Homer and Hesiod) in an entirely material world. Death is not the symbol of death but is death itself, the killer. Sin is not the symbol of sin but sin itself, for she is metonymically, rather than metaphorically, connected, by 'secretest conveyance,' to every sinful act as its cause" (*Delirious Milton*, 30-1).

<sup>20</sup> See Voltaire, *Essay*, 114-16: "We must first lay down that such shadowy Beings, as *Death*, *Sin*, *Chaos*, are intolerable when they are not allegorical. [...] there are Parts in that Fiction, which bearing no Allegory at all, have no Manner of Excuse. There is no Meaning in the Communication between Death and Sin, 'tis distasteful without any Purpose; or if any Allegory lies under it, the filthy Abomination of the Thing is certainly more obvious than the Allegory". Cf. S. J. Gallagher, "'Real or Allegoric'", *ELR* 6 (1976): 317-35, p. 323: "The insistent physicality of these individuals [i.e., Sin and Death] pressures the reader to regard their generation as a literal fact of cosmic history."

<sup>21</sup> It also seems implausible to read into Milton's thinking the modern periodisation of ancient Greece, and to presume that he would have distinguished between "archaic" and "classical" daemons. For the background of Teskey's argument here, see his *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, 1996), 32-55, and for the background of this, Fletcher's discussion of personification and "daemonic" agency in *Allegory*, 24-68. However, as Fletcher clearly acknowledges (44-5), and as the demonology of Milton's *Paradise Lost* explicitly insists, in Christian contexts pagan demons were typically explained as good or bad angels. Whatever, then, is to be made of Fletcher's "daemonic" theory of allegorical agency, it is a wholly different and unwarranted move to credit Milton with an inverted form of the same theory, a view that his Christian demonology explicitly contradicts.

<sup>22</sup> See *The New Milton Criticism*, ed. P. C. Herman and E. Sauer (Cambridge, 2012): the collection aims to showcase "a Milton criticism resistant to reading Milton into coherence, a criticism that treats his work – *Paradise Lost* especially but not exclusively – as conflicted rather than serene, and that explicitly highlights the spirit of critical inquiry in Milton's writing" (1).

personifications until Addison, more than a generation after the poem's first edition. It could be that Milton and his earliest readers did not apply the same standards of ontological consistency to his work as we have come to expect since, and which, if conscientiously applied to *Paradise Lost*, unfold inexorably to one of the two extreme positions exemplified above by Borris and Teskey. It could also be, however, that the poem's earliest readers, at least those whose responses have come down to us, were in tune with a more sophisticated understanding of Milton's work, which the eighteenth century lost, and which Milton criticism would begin to recover, slowly and abortively, only after the discovery of *De doctrina Christiana*.<sup>23</sup>

The presents study inclines strongly to the latter view, and even though my primary aim is not to intervene directly in these debates, it seems advisable to offer at least a cursory account of an approach which is, in my view, the preferred response to the venerable, robust and increasingly self-aware allegorical school of *Paradise Lost* criticism, whose emergence and development are discussed in the ensuing sections of this chapter. Such an account should indicate the larger context which this discussion hopes to illumine, and put some perspective on the claims, occasionally proffered by the allegorists, that their work champions a controversial and suppressed approach to Milton's work.<sup>24</sup> Far from being controversial, the allegorical reading of *Paradise Lost* has in fact been a core Miltonist orthodoxy at least since the days of Samuel Johnson, albeit with significant variations in terminology and emphasis. While it is thus true that the term *allegory* fell out of favour for a substantial portion of this period, readings that are allegorical in spirit if not in the letter continued, and were effortlessly rechristened once the term returned to fashion in the late twentieth century. What *has* been controversial, however, is precisely the opposite, reading this poem for what it actually says,

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<sup>23</sup> Milton's theological treatise came to light in 1823, and was first published in 1825: *Joannis Miltoni Angli De doctrina Christiana libri duo posthumi*, ed. C. R. Sumner (Cambridge, 1825); *A Treatise on Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge, 1825). Doubts about Milton's authorship, most notably by W. B. Hunter, have now been conclusively put to rest; see Hunter's *Visitation Unimplor'd* (Pittsburgh, 1998), and the response in G. Campbell *et al.*, *Milton and the Manuscript of "De Doctrina Christiana"* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Martin, *Ruins*, 11, presenting her work as countering a supposed "repression or effacement of the existence of allegory in a work [...] largely governed by that mode"; Borris, *Allegory*, 183: while "controversial in twentieth-century Milton studies", the allegorical approach "has had diverse proponents, in various formulations, and has gained much force since 1990".



and mainstream criticism, as we shall see, has gone to extraordinary lengths to combat this heresy.

By contrast, the present study presupposes, and hopes to contribute to, an understanding of *Paradise Lost* as a poem which adheres to a high, proto-modern standard of ontological consistency, and which, by reconstructing the highly sophisticated mode of representation Milton designed for his work, largely vindicates the intuitive literalism of a reader like Teskey. It also presupposes a work vitally informed by some of the most important and daring contemporary advances in a number of fields, including theology, biblical criticism, mythography, or natural philosophy, and in ways which often resonate powerfully with informed contemporary readers. Neither are Milton's ideas dead, nor is *Paradise Lost* a monument. The intellectual ferment of the mid-seventeenth century is not presented here in some embalmed, abstract form, but as transmuted by an extraordinarily vivid, uncannily prescient, and often simply volatile poetic imagination, the more remote reaches of which are yet to be adequately charted. Too much of this is muted in the readings of the allegorists, whose Milton is, by comparison, orthodox in his theological, philosophical, political, and literary views, and also conservative in his maintenance of these views, so that works and statements of later can be illumined by those of earlier periods, and vice versa. Instead, the ensuing pages presume a man who changed his mind about things, and who generally tended to change his mind from more to less conventional opinions, so that it is of utmost importance when and in what context he wrote or said this or that.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, every scholar of Milton's work will be at least nominally informed about a number of unorthodox theological and philosophical views Milton adopted by the late 1650s:

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<sup>25</sup> The past decades in particular have seen a growing appreciation of the heterodox nature of many of Milton's theological and philosophical views, as well as of conflicted and aporetic elements in his poetry: major statements include J. P. Rumrich, *Milton Unbound* (Cambridge, 1997); *Milton and Heresy*, ed. S. B. Dobranski and J. P. Rumrich (Cambridge, 1998); P. C. Herman, *Destabilizing Milton* (New York, 2005), 19; *New Milton Criticism*, ed. Herman. An important caveat here is that these two projects are not always and necessarily compatible: a heretical Milton is not necessarily the "indeterminate" or "uncertain" Milton of Rumrich and Herman, nor is a determinate and certain Milton necessarily an orthodox one. An obvious example would be Milton's portrayal of the deity, which is infinitely more conflicted and problematic if read in the light of Trinitarian than of anti-Trinitarian doctrine. For an argument that all of Milton's heresies are logical corollaries of his monism, see J. L. Padgett, "The Monistic Continuity of the Miltonic Heresy", diss. Ball State University, 1987. On the imperative of approaching Milton's thought as changing and developing over the course of his career, see J. T. Shawcross, *The Development of Milton's Thought* (Pittsburgh, 2008).

his anti-Trinitarianism, Arminianism, monism, mortalism, traducianism, and so on. Often, however, one gets the impression that the significance of these views for our understanding of Milton's poetry – especially outside of direct parallels, notably in *Paradise Lost* – is still not adequately appreciated.<sup>26</sup> Thus has *De doctrina Christiana*, the work which often presents us with the best evidence of Milton's mature opinions on a variety of theological and philosophical topics, recently been described as “probably the worst place to begin trying to like Milton”.<sup>27</sup> “To like Milton”, it is claimed, “we really need to go right back to the beginning”, the juvenilia collected in the 1645 *Poems* – “young writing”, “full of aspirations”, “less awe-inspiringly assured than *Paradise Lost*, but [...] infinitely more touching”.<sup>28</sup> In a superficial sense this is of course true: *De doctrina* admittedly contains some of Milton's driest and most abstruse writing, on ideas which can seem hopelessly distant from the interests of most contemporary readers. On second look, however, it is precisely these ideas that often present us with what is probably the best, and sometimes perhaps the only way in which certain aspects of Milton's work can be made accessible to broader contemporary audiences.

They can even enhance our appreciation of such passages of obvious human interest as the famous excursus on blindness in *Paradise Lost*, where Milton laments, *in propria persona*:

Thus with the Year

Seasons return, but not to me returns

Day, or the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn,

Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summers Rose,

Or flocks, or heards, or human face divine;

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<sup>26</sup> Or is, indeed, programmatically bracketed, the argument being that whatever views Milton expounded in his prose, poetry is a wholly different matter, and should not be scoured for coherent theological doctrine. This view is refuted not only by explicitly theological content found within the poem itself, but also the records of early readers acutely conscious of this content: among other examples discussed below, see S. Morland's reference to *Paradise Lost* as a “Treatise” rather than a poem (n. 163), or R. Blackmore's statement, explicitly encompassing *Paradise Lost*, that “Epick Poetry is indeed the Theology of the Country where the Poet lives, and every Work of this kind is a System of the Religion, and a sort of Confession of the Publick Faith there establish'd”; see R. Blackmore, *An Essay on the Nature and Constitution of Epick Poetry*, in *Essays upon Several Subjects* 1st. ed. (London, 1716), 74.

<sup>27</sup> C. Burrow, “Shall I go on?”, *London Review of Books*, 7 March 2013, 3-8.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

But cloud in stead, and ever-during dark

Surrounds me (3.40-6)

In polemics, Milton boasted of how stoically he took his blindness (*YP* 4: 582-92). In polite conversation, he could dispatch royalist triumphalism with a deadpan one-liner that affords us a precious glimpse of the “Satyricall” table-talk reported by Dryden.<sup>29</sup> The two sonnets on blindness similarly stage triumphs of “patience” and “conscience”, carefully orchestrated at the *voltas*, over the “murmur” of despair and resentment. How soulless it would be to suppose, however, that he did not suffer profoundly, and at least in this place he was willing to drop the mask of stoic self-possession and give some genuine expression to this suffering.

Surely here is a Milton as touching and likeable as anything in his youthful poems, expressing sentiments of universal human interest in plain-English blank verse – and yet, even here, the full import of the verses can be appreciated only by those who have served in the trenches of *De doctrina*. Take, for instance, Milton’s much-discussed and now broadly accepted monism, the poetic statements of which, notably the “one first matter” speech in *Paradise Lost* (5.469-503), are greatly enriched by the more elaborate discussion in the treatise.<sup>30</sup> Few aspects of Milton’s thought are more entangled in the technicalities of

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<sup>29</sup> “One visiting Milton. doe you not sometime reflect on your blindness as a judgment for your writing agst K. Charles &c. Milton I am blind Salmasius is dead w<sup>ch</sup> is the greater judgment?” The anecdote is recorded in one of the notebooks of A. Hill (c. 1635-1722), now British Library, Sloane MS 2896, 143r, first transcribed and discussed in W. Poole, “Two Early Readers of Milton”, *MQ* 38 (2004): 76-99, p. 90. Clearly this is the original of the later and now demonstrably apocryphal forms of this anecdote, tentatively accepted by, among others, J. M. French, *The Life Records of John Milton* (New Brunswick, 1949-58), 4: 391, and W. R. Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, 2nd ed., rev. G. Campbell (Oxford, 1996), 1092, n. 55. According to Dryden, as reported by Aubrey, Milton was “Extreme pleasant in his conversation, & at dinner, supper &c: but Satyricall”; *The Early Lives of Milton*, ed. H. Darbishire (London, 1932), 6.

<sup>30</sup> See *De doctrina*, 1.7. For an overview of the discussion up to the 1990s, see Fallon, *Philosophers*, 4-5. Fallon defines Milton’s position as “animist materialism”, positing that “All that exists, from angels to earth, is composed of one *living*, corporeal substance” (1, emphasis mine). The position is said to be “unusual”, “subtle and ingenious”, and “best understood as an original synthesis of ideas, [...] which countered the threats to free will and theism posed by the new science and emerging mechanism” (1, 79, 107). The consensus on Milton’s monism has been contested by Sugimura, arguing that Milton’s “intellectual development over the trajectory of his career suggest[s] that his conception of matter and spirit is far more confused and complex than the orthodox picture of him as a monist materialist admits”; see N. K. Sugimura, “*Matter of Glorious Trial*” (New Haven, 2009), xvi. There is much that is useful in Sugimura’s wide-ranging book, but the central thesis proves unpersuasive. She argues that Milton’s oeuvre does not align with a coherent philosophical system, but nobody ever claimed it did; Fallon certainly labours to show how Milton gradually abandoned his early dualism to embrace views attested in his mature work (*Philosophers*, 79-98). Passages of special importance elicit special pleading. Fallon and others are mistaken to think that Raphael speaks of matter when he speaks of “matter” (*Paradise Lost*, 5.472) – this is merely a metaphor for “a strange potentiality cussing on power”, which Raphael employs only so that he could disrupt its “overriding monist tenor” (“*Matter*”, 44). Up to a point, Sugimura is right to criticize the tendency “to emphasize [...] the importance of one word: ‘matter’” (ibid., xv); without

seventeenth-century theology and philosophy, and yet few can make him appear more in tune with our age, which is not only materialist but is often moved to quasi-religious sentiments by the insight, by now degenerated into a cliché, that the elements which compose our world and our very bodies are quite literally stardust, uniting us, on a fundamental level, with the incomprehensibly vast and ancient universe we inhabit.<sup>31</sup> How remarkable, then, that three and a half centuries earlier Milton has Raphael inform Adam that

one Almighty is, from whom  
All things proceed, and up to him return,  
If not depriv'd from good, created all  
Such to perfection, one first matter all,  
Indu'd with various forms, various degrees  
Of substance, and in things that live, of life (5.469-74)

True, Adam is not precisely starstuff, or is so in an indirect sense – stars are made of the “Ethereal quintessence”, man of the four “cumbrous” elements, infused with the “breath of Life” (3.714-19, 7.524-8) – yet all of these, except for the ontologically ambiguous “breath of

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adequate qualifications, this can be misleading. But what is at stake here is, precisely, one word – a terminological rather than a conceptual problem, as Fallon clearly acknowledges, for example when he writes that Milton’s “‘one first matter’ extends from *what we think of as matter* to reason, the ‘being’ of the soul” (*Philosophers*, 103, emphasis mine). Against the general drift of Milton’s mature thought to obliterate the distinction, Sugimura preys at such verbal lapses as the project inevitably entails, in which Milton’s monism encounters resistance from the dualist conceptual apparatus deeply embedded in the language he is using – as, yet again, Fallon clearly recognizes (*Philosophers*, 102). Had Milton written “one first spirit” instead of “one first matter all” – which would change absolutely nothing in his philosophy – and had Fallon then written of his “materialist spiritualism”, Sugimura could criticize him with equal propriety for overemphasizing the importance of the word “spirit”. In my view, the problematic part of Fallon’s thesis is not the “materialism” but the animism, the claim that Milton believed that matter is “essentially alive”, and that he endorsed this view “as if he is saying that the deadness of the material world is too great a price to pay for the immortality of a separable soul” (107). This seems explicitly contradicted by the same key passage in *Paradise Lost*: “one first matter all,/ Indu’d with various forms, various degrees/ Of substance, *and in things that live, of life*” (5.472-4, emphasis mine).

<sup>31</sup> This sentiment is usually said to have passed into broad circulation with C. Sagan’s extremely popular BBC series *Cosmos*. “Some part of our being”, intones Sagan deep into the camera lens, against the backdrop of a majestic, wind-swept coastline of Monterey, California, “knows this is where we came from. We long to return. And we can, because the cosmos is also within us. We’re made of starstuff.” The quote is transcribed from the first episode in the series, “The Shores of the Cosmic Ocean”, which originally aired on 28 September 1980. An alternative statement of the same idea, also often quoted, appears in the book based on the series, reputedly the best-selling scientific publication in the English language, C. Sagan, *Cosmos* (1981; repr. London, 2003), 255-6: “The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of starstuff.” For an early study of how Sagan’s work “creates a mythic understanding of science which serves for television audiences the same needs that religious discourse has traditionally satisfied for churchgoers”, see T. M. Lessl, “Science and the Sacred Cosmos”, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71 (1985): 175-87.

life”, are forms of the same primal matter.<sup>32</sup> Note, furthermore, that just as with Sagan, there is, both before and after the fall, a promise of return: “time may come when men/ With Angels may participate”, and “Improv’d by tract of time, [...] wingd ascend/ Ethereal” (5.493-9). This is not, or is not only, a moral ascent: the “cumbrous” elements may, by a process inherent in all incorrupt matter, be eventually sublimed into “Ethereal quintessence”, starstuff proper – a prospect that still seemed perfectly feasible to an American critic of the prelapsarian 1920s.<sup>33</sup>

The most radical aspect of all this is the effacement of an ontological boundary between body and soul, and the consequent acceptance of traducianism and mortalism, the doctrine that the soul lives and dies together with the body – or more precisely, at least in Milton’s view, indistinguishable from the body – until resurrected at the last judgment.<sup>34</sup> For

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<sup>32</sup> Traditionally the “breath of life” of Gen. 2:7 was identified with the soul. Milton thus had to come up with an alternative explanation, and this drives him to some uncharacteristically vague formulations in *De doctrina*, 1.7: the “infused breath of life [...] was not something divine – part of the divine essence, as it were – that was imparted to man by God, but only something human, representing a fixed portion of divine virtue [...]. For he infused the breath of life even into the other animate creatures too”; the “breath of life was neither part of the divine essence, nor was it even the soul, but a certain breeze or divine power wafted out, suitable only for the power of life and reason and instilled in an organic body; since man himself when finally made – the whole man himself, I say – is in distinct words called ‘a living soul’” (*OW* 8: 121-2).

<sup>33</sup> See Larson, *Modernity*, 137: “We need not consider this transformation a mere fancy with Milton: he probably took it very seriously. And, in all sober earnest, is it really unreasonable to believe that man, who has, as science tells us, developed from a little mass of quivering jelly, may, with a lesser further evolution, be able to throw off the dross of his material body and sail upon the depths of azure blue? May not this potentiality be realized in a few ages, in an eon or two?” With regard to Larson’s “depths of azure blue”, see Leonard’s discussion (*Labourers*, 734-4) of the residually Ptolemaic, bright blue cosmos imagined by Milton’s nineteenth-century editor Masson, who describes the universe – the real universe of what he calls “modern science” – as “an absolute, boundless, ocean of azure space”, an “enormous sphere of blue”. “The change from a bright to a dark universe”, comments Leonard, “is one of the most profound paradigm shifts in the history of ‘cosmic imaginings’ – as profound as Copernicus’s displacing of the earth, but unlike ‘the Copernican revolution’, it seems to have occasioned no debate and little notice. [...] Modern readers, accustomed to a ‘pitch-black’ universe, are unsurprised by the darkness of Milton’s abyss, but Masson can help us see how prophetic Milton’s ‘cosmic imaginings’ were.” Leonard speculates that Masson’s blue universe was dispelled by scientific discoveries of c.1859-71, but Larson’s “depths of azure blue” would seem to indicate an even longer afterlife. The phrase appears in several poems from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, where it plainly means nothing more than “sky”, but note that the text on which Larson is commenting – the “one first matter” speech, specifically the prospect that men will eventually “wingd ascend/ Ethereal, [...] or may at choice/ Here or in Heav’nly Paradise dwell” – intimates precisely future “space travel”.

<sup>34</sup> Protestants like Luther and Tyndale maintained the doctrine of psychopannichism, according to which the soul sleeps, rather than dies, until awoken at the last judgment, and which thus preserves the soul’s immortality while dispensing with the problem of intermediate states. For Milton’s views, see *De doctrina*, 1.7 and 1.13: “man is an animate being [*animal*], inherently and properly one and individual, not twofold or separable – or, as is commonly declared, combined or composed from two mutually and generically different and distinct natures, namely soul and body – but [...] the whole of man is soul, and the soul is man; namely, a body or substance which is individual, animated, sensitive, and rational”; “the whole person dies; [...] body, spirit, and soul” (*OW* 8: 121-2, 175). For a recent discussion of the mortalist heresy in the context of competing conceptions of secularisation and modernity, see N. McDowell, “Dead Souls and Modern Minds?”, *JMEMS* 40 (2010): 559-92.

the dualist, withdrawal from the senses brings one closer to the transcendent mystery of God, and ultimately, death releases the immortal soul from its prison in the body, to be reunited with its divine source. As Fallon notes, the young Milton, the Milton we are supposed to like, was an orthodox dualist, and could speak of the body as a “foul prison”, “darksome House of mortal Clay”, “fleshly nook”, “mortal dross”, “Earthy grosnes”.<sup>35</sup> Even for a philosophically sophisticated dualist like Milton’s contemporary and intellectual antipode Kenelm Digby, the soul can be imagined as indistinguishable from the body only until their separation at death, and so the senses can, in the final analysis, only be a distraction.<sup>36</sup>

The monist, however, for whom the body is not a prison, and knowledge acquired through the senses is not illusory or (qualitatively) deficient, has every reason to regret having “wisdom at one entrance quite shut out” (*Paradise Lost*, 3.50). But it is more than a source of knowledge that Milton lost. For one to whom all creation is but dispersion of the “one first matter” into “various forms” and “various degrees/ Of substance”, the visible world does not merely symbolize or adumbrate the magnificence of its creator, or the glory of the world to come – it *is*, in its very material being, itself divine, and since its beauties thus occasion

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<sup>35</sup> The quotations are from “In obitum Præsulis Eliensis” (On the Death of the Bishop of Ely) (46), “Nativity Ode” (14), “Il Penseroso” (92) and “On Time” (6, 20); cf. Fallon, *Philosophers*, 80-1.

<sup>36</sup> Thus Digby’s major philosophical work, the 1644 *Two Treatises*, logically ends with a call to ascetic mysticism (Nnn2v). For an even stronger statement of the same view, see the philosophical fragment extant in two manuscript versions, an earlier one, dated 19 June 1634, in Morgan MS, B, 59v-62r, and (quoted here) a later one, undated, in Harley MS 4153, 14r-18r: “We must (as Plato sayth), separate our selues from all matters or corporeall substances, or the knowledge that result of them: Nay yet further; (allowing to *S<sup>r</sup>. Dionysius Areopagita*) wee must exclude out of our minde all *Intelligible Species* whatsoever; euen of spirituall objects: And then, the soul will liue by contemplation when it is dead to sense, and eleuated aboue ratiocinative discourse.” The less radical position of the *Two Treatises* accords with a more nuanced view of the soul’s relation to the senses espoused in this work: “the soules being in a body, is not an imprisonment of a thing that was existent before the soul and body mett together; but her being there, is the naturall course of beginning that which can no other way come into the listes of nature”; the soul’s “nature is to be a compartner to the body, and to acquire her perfection by the mediation and seruice of corporeall senses”; it is “naturally designed to be in a body: but her being in a body, is her being one thing with the body, she is said to be in: and so she is one part of a whole, which from its weaker part is determined to be a body” (Kkk1r). Apparently the possibility of Digby’s influence on Milton has not been seriously considered; Fallon omits him “because his work neither closely parallels Milton’s nor presents, like Hobbes’s, a particular threat to Milton’s beliefs” (*Philosophers*, 98-9, n. 23). In fact, although obviously problematic – what does it mean for the soul to be “immaterial” and yet, however temporarily, “one thing with the body”? how can the soul be “one thing with the body” at the same time as it is “one part of a whole”? – Digby’s position offers an interesting contemporary alternative to Milton’s, seeking to preserve the immortality of the soul while at the same time groping for a philosophical upgrade to simpler and increasingly untenable forms of dualism. Also of interest, in the light of Milton’s personification of Sin, is Digby’s comparison of the state of the “vicious” and “disordered” soul in the afterlife to “the fansie of the Poets, who fained a monster, which they termed Scylla, whose inferiour partes, were a company of dogges, euer snarling and quarrelling among themselues; and yet were vnseuerable from one an other, as being compartes of the same substance” (*Two Treatises*, Iii3v).

delights far beyond the aesthetic (or aesthetic in an immeasurably deeper sense), the loss of that beauty and those delights is proportionally devastating. Nor would Milton be restored to this beauty in the afterlife. Upon his death, his soul would not soar aloft, as that of the bishop of Ely he eulogized as a seventeen-year-old, or that of Digby, observing, “an infinite distance” below, the melancholy spectacle of time “wasting the existences of all corporeall things from nothing to nothing, in a perpetuall streame”.<sup>37</sup> The whole of John Milton, living soul, would die, and when sight was restored to his reconstituted eyes at the second coming, they would behold a world very different from the one he had left, a world populated by supernatural beings and bent on a divinely ordained conflagration.<sup>38</sup> There would be greater beauties, a new earth, and who knows, perhaps heaven and earth would really turn out to be “Each to other like, more then on earth is thought” (*Paradise Lost*, 5.576). Yet on this world, as it was when he last saw it – the world which, however fallen, was the stage on which the drama of human suffering and human hope had unfolded until its cataclysmic final act – he would never look upon again.

The most profound loss, however, is the one last mentioned, of the “human face divine”. Here again the poignancy of Milton’s verses can be fully appreciated only in the light of a related and highly technical piece of theological heterodoxy. For centuries, Christian theologians had accounted for the Bible’s anthropomorphic and anthropopathic representations of God, and biblical representations more generally, as concessions to the limits of human understanding, a doctrine known as divine accommodation or

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<sup>37</sup> Milton, “In obitum”; Digby, *Two Treatises*, Nnn2r. The editors have noted the obvious similarities between the ascent of the soul in “In obitum” and of the souls borne to the Paradise of Fools in *Paradise Lost*, but have failed to grasp its implications. Thus Lewalski and Haan note that the 1626 poem “affords insights into Milton’s early conception of the cosmic journey, which would come to feature much more prominently in *Paradise Lost*” (*OW* 3: cxxi). It would come to feature indeed, but precisely as a travesty of this conception, including that entertained in Milton’s own youthful poem. “I flew”, the comforting voice reassures the weeping speaker of “In obitum”, “past the globe of the gleaming sun and far beneath my feet I beheld the triform goddess as she restrained the dragons with reins of gold. I am carried through the ranks of wandering stars, through the expanses of the Milky Way; often I marvelled at my newly acquired speed until I reached the resplendent entrance of Olympus, the palace of crystal, the court paved with emeralds” (55-64). The change of tone in *Paradise Lost* is striking: “They pass the Planets seven, and pass the fixt,/ And that Crystalline Sphear whose ballance weighs/ And now Saint Peter at Heavn’s Wicket seems/ To wait them with his Keys” (3.479-85).

<sup>38</sup> On Milton’s eschatology, see *De doctrina*, 1.33, and *Paradise Lost*, 12.536-51. Various aspects of the subject are discussed in the papers collected in *Milton and the Ends of Time*, ed. J. Cummins (Oxford, 2003); see esp. Cummins’ chapter, “Milton and Apocalyptic Transformations in *Paradise Lost*”, on the monist basis of the last judgment in *Paradise Lost*.

condescension.<sup>39</sup> As traditionally understood, accommodation entailed a hermeneutics often indistinguishable from allegoresis, whereby human qualities ascribed to God were understood to signify non-human qualities which God really possesses. God's eyelids, for example, signify his "incomprehensible Judgement", his mouth "His commandments given unto men", and so forth.<sup>40</sup> Alternatively, in line with a more negative theological outlook, the idea can also manifest itself as a one-sided, hermeneutically abortive position: it is a given that God's

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<sup>39</sup> For a general study of the doctrine, permeating, under various terms, in various contexts, at various historical periods, Jewish and Christian theology from Philo onwards, see S. D. Benin, *The Footprints of God* (Albany, 1993). Few things would be more beneficial to *Paradise Lost* criticism than a judicious critique of the ways in which the notion of "accommodation" has been used in Milton studies, where it appears to have gained currency through R. M. Frye's inexplicably influential *God, Man, and Satan* (1960; repr. Port Washington, 1972), esp. 3-17. To Frye's credit, he makes perfectly explicit the presentist orientation of his work: he is not attempting "a scholarly reconstruction of the seventeenth-century *weltanschauungen* [*sic*] of Milton and Bunyan" but is seeking to "establish [...] a vital interaction" between the work of these writers and contemporary theology, for the benefit of believing readers "who feel the need for an interpretation of such subjects as heaven and hell, angels and devils, in terms intelligible to the modern mind" (4-6). This should have served as a warning to critics who extended to Milton Frye's account of accommodation as a "system of symbols" instructing believers to conceive of God "largely on the analogy of personality": "God, though in essence beyond human comprehension, is to be dealt with as a person, rather than as an abstraction or absolute. The personal quality of God is conveyed through virtually every revealing accommodation of the Biblical symbols, [...] and is ultimately manifested in the historical person of the incarnate Son" (13). These are not "mere symbols", however, to be abandoned in pursuit of "an abstract conception of God", yet neither are they "identical with what they symbolize, and are not to be clung to in their visible signs", but rather "communicate in a definite way by the direction of their meaning" (12). This last phrase illustrates the strain placed on such reasoning, and in practice it soon becomes clear that Frye's symbolic accommodation is indistinguishable from allegory. Satan, for example, is such an accommodated symbol: "Christianity summarizes the source of evil under the symbol of the demonic", meaning that Satan is "not an independent evil being" but precisely the sort of abstraction that "accommodation" supposedly discourages – a "sphere", an "anti-model", a "force", "an interpretation of a certain type of life", "a commentary on life, on human frustration and fulfilment" (22-25). Nor can, on the other hand, "accommodation" be legitimately presented as an ancient alternative to allegory, a hermeneutic doctrine that somehow evades the separation between two or more levels of meaning. For a major recent statement, see Raymond, according to whom "accommodation" provides such a "third way", by which "transcendental spiritual truths could be conveyed to finite human comprehension, without distortion or misrepresentation", and thus, in its Protestant varieties, reinforces the "emphasis on the primacy of the 'literal sense'", unlike allegory, which "supposes a fierce separation between representation and the thing represented" (164-7, 224). Contrary to such claims, the idea that scriptural expressions are "accommodated" to human understanding does not, in itself, prescribe any particular type of hermeneutics, and has certainly been used as theological justification for allegorical readings of the most traditional type. The doctrine *can* lead to such positions as Raymond describes – and certainly Milton is bending it to a very unusual purpose – but it does not *necessarily* do so, and in fact views comparable to Milton's seem exceedingly rare. Critics like Raymond take Milton's highly unorthodox views as their starting point, and then project them, ignoring the emphatically polemical edge of his argument, onto an imaginary tradition to which they supposedly belong.

<sup>40</sup> The examples come from a 1642 handbook by R. Bernard (Figure 6), quoted in C. A. Patrides, "Paradise Lost and the Theory of Accommodation", *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 5 (1963): 58-63, p. 61. Bernard's tables afford a good illustration of the degree of conventionalisation such an approach had attained by Milton's day.



And he is said to have by an <i>Antropomorfosis</i> .		
<i>An Arme.</i> <i>Apple of the eye</i> <i>Eyes.</i> <i>Eye-lids.</i>	{ His Power, Strength and Fortitude. That which is most dearest unto him. His Providence, knowledge and favour. The incomprehensible Judgement of God.	<i>Gen</i> 49.24. <i>Deut</i> 32.10. <i>2 Chron.</i> 16.9. <i>Psal.</i> 114.
		<i>Backparts.</i>

A Description of Gods Attributes.			3
<i>Backparts</i> <i>Eaves.</i> <i>A Face.</i> <i>His face bid.</i> <i>Feete.</i> <i>A finger.</i> <i>A foute foote.</i> <i>A Head</i> <i>A Hind.</i> <i>A right hand.</i> <i>A Heart.</i> <i>A Mouth.</i> <i>Memory.</i> <i>A Nose.</i> <i>Nostrill.</i> <i>Oblivion.</i> <i>Sences.</i> <i>A Soule.</i> <i>A Shade.</i> <i>A Throne.</i> <i>A Way.</i> <i>Wings.</i>	{ God is said to have { By which is meant {	An imperfect representation of him. His willingnesse in hearing our prayers. His Presence and favourable kindnesse. That declareth his severity. His Strength and presence to governe. His Spirit, Vertue and Efficacie. His Authority over the ungodly. The Essence of his Deitie and God-head. His Might, Protection and Justice. His Authoritie and his Fortitude. His lively Essence and his Decree. His Commandements given unto men. That he remembreth mercies. His very Anger against sinners. His favourable acceptance of Sacrifices. That he imputeth not our sinnes unto us. His Providence over his Creatures. His Life together with his Essence. His Protection over all his Creatures. His Princely power and Majestic. The course of all his Actions. His defence in preserving the godly.	<i>Exod.</i> 33.23. <i>Psal</i> 51.2. <i>Psal.</i> 31.16. <i>Psal.</i> 30.7. <i>Psal.</i> 110.1. <i>Exod.</i> 31.18. <i>Isa</i> 66.1. <i>Dan.</i> 7.9. <i>Iob</i> 19.21. <i>Psal.</i> 110.1. <i>Gen.</i> 6.6. <i>Ier.</i> 9.12. <i>Psal.</i> 25.6. <i>Ier.</i> 35.32. <i>Gen.</i> 8.21. <i>Psal.</i> 32.2. <i>Psal</i> 14.3. <i>Isa</i> 1.14. <i>Psal</i> 121.5. <i>Isa.</i> 66.1. <i>Psal.</i> 103.7. <i>Psal.</i> 17.8.
And he is said to			
<i>Breathe.</i> <i>Heare.</i> <i>See.</i> <i>Smell.</i> <i>Sorrow.</i> <i>Repent.</i> <i>Rest.</i> <i>Sit.</i> <i>Sleepe.</i> <i>Come unto us.</i> <i>Dwell in us.</i> <i>Descend.</i>	{ God is said to { By which is meant {	That he doth infuse the soule into the body. That he accomplisheth mans request. That he knoweth all things that are done. His acceptation of mans doings. The dislike of the things which causeth it. A change of the thing purposed on Mans repentance. That he ceaseth from Creating. That he playeth the part of a Judge. That he is slow in succouring. That he causeth us to feele his Grace. That he confirms us in the trust of his Grace. That he is not ignorant of the things on Earth.	<i>Gen.</i> 2.7. <i>Psal</i> 5.2. <i>Psal.</i> 11.4. <i>Gen</i> 8.21. <i>Gen.</i> 6.6. <i>Iob.</i> 3.10. <i>Gen.</i> 2.2. <i>Psal.</i> 1.4. <i>Psal.</i> 44.23. <i>Psal.</i> 6.4. <i>Iob.</i> 14.23. <i>Gen.</i> 11.7.
And he is said to be by an <i>Anthropopathie</i> .			
<i>Angrie.</i> <i>Exalted.</i> <i>Jealous.</i> <i>Justified.</i> <i>Full.</i> <i>Silent.</i> <i>Weary.</i> <i>Zealous.</i> <i>Patient.</i>	{ By which is meant {	His Threatning of punishment. That his Majestic is exalted. His great Indignation against Idolatrie. That he is justified being just and good. That he is not delighted in a thing. That he heareth not our Prayers. That he cannot abide some thing. The love that he hath to his Church. His willing forbearance to punish till sinnes be ripened.	<i>Ho'e.</i> 11.1. <i>Psal.</i> 57.11. <i>Numb.</i> 25.11. <i>Luk</i> 7.29. <i>Isa.</i> 1.14. <i>Psal.</i> 11.1. <i>Isa.</i> 1.14. (2X).19. <i>Isa.</i> 9.9. (31). <i>2 Pet.</i> 3.9.

Figure 6. Tables explaining the meanings of God's attributes in R. Bernard's *The Bibles Abstract and Epitomie* (London, 1642), Aaa2v-3r. Several entries illustrate the difficulty of consistently avoiding anthropopathic and anthropomorphic language: God's anger, for example, signifies "His Threatening of Punishment", yet God's nose signifies "His very Anger against sinners".

eyelids are an accommodation, but precisely because the divine reality signified by this expression is unknowable, we cannot comprehend what they are an accommodation of. In practice, this is largely a matter of emphasis, for as we saw with Augustine, the generally accepted fact that God is unspeakable rarely stopped anyone from speaking about him. “With a wise silence we do honour to the inexpressible”, says Pseudo-Dionysius, one of the major exponents in this tradition, and then goes on to anatomize it in many pages of extravagantly expressive prose.<sup>41</sup> Crucially, the hermeneutics of accommodation, as understood by the overwhelming majority of commentators up to Milton’s day, urges believers to move away from scriptural representations of the deity to a contemplation of the divine reality these representations signify. Views to the contrary, from Melito of Sardis in the second to the Socinians in the seventeenth century – whose *Racovian Catechism* burned on the streets of London in 1652 despite having been licensed for printing by none other than John Milton – never entered the mainstream of Christian tradition, and were invariably branded heretical wherever they acquired any level of acceptance.<sup>42</sup>

In one of the most daring passages in *De doctrina*, Milton espouses a view of accommodation which departs radically from this orthodoxy in extending a limited validity to the scriptural representations of the deity taken in their literal sense:

Our safest way is to encompass God with our mind as he shows himself and describes himself in sacred literature. For although it be granted that God is always either described or outlined not as he really is but as we can grasp him, yet it will be no less our duty to imagine him in our mind exactly as he – in adapting [*accommodans*] himself to our grasp – wants to be imagined. For he has lowered himself to us [*se ad nos demisit*] for the very purpose of preventing us from loftily exceeding human grasp

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<sup>41</sup> *The Complete Works* (London, 1987), 50 (598B).

<sup>42</sup> On Milton and Socinianism, see M. Lieb, *Theological Milton* (Pittsburgh, 2006), 213-60, and M. Dzelzainis, “Milton and Antitrinitarianism”, in *Milton and Toleration*, ed. S. Achinstein and E. Sauer (Oxford, 2007). More broadly on Milton’s anti-Trinitarianism, see M. Bauman, *Milton’s Arianism* (Frankfurt, 1987), and several of the essays in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Dobranski and Rumrich, notably Rumrich’s “Milton’s Arianism”. The closest and most relevant parallels to Milton’s views on divine nature that I have come across are found in the writings of the Socinian J. Biddle, who also attempted to produce a complete statement of Christian doctrine based solely on scripture alone, and scripture taken solely in its literal sense. For Biddle’s view of divine nature as represented in the scripture, see the following note. Biddle’s views are discussed by Raymond, *Angels*, 173-5.

and written record, and from giving space to vague thoughts and sophistries.

Here, therefore, I think, Theologians have no need for anthropopathy (a term the Grammarians once thought up to justify poets' nonsense about their god Jupiter); sacred scripture has indubitably taken good care neither to write anything unseemly or unworthy of God itself, nor to represent God as speaking thus of himself. [...] As to what is proper or improper for God, let us not demand a weightier authority than God himself. If *Jehovah regretted having made humankind*, Gen. 6: 6, and [*regretted*] *their groaning*, Judg. 2: 18, let us believe that he did feel regret; only let us not suppose that in God, as in mortals, the sorrow was born of inadvertency [...]. If God is said *to have created man after his own image, after his own likeness*, Gen. 1: 26 – and not just a spiritual one, either, but an outward physical one too, unless the same words do not mean the same as later, ch. 5: 3, where Adam *begot a son after his own likeness, after his own image* – and if God assigned himself a thoroughly human body and aspect, why should we be afraid to assign him what he assigned himself, so long as we believe that what is imperfect and feeble in us is most perfect and beautiful wherever assigned to God? (*OW* 8: 10-11)<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Biddle in the Preface to his *Twofold Catechism* (London, 1654), A6v-8r, discussing representations of God as a paradigmatic example of how traditional interpretations – “mystical or figurative”, “Figures & Allegories” – manipulate the plain sense of the scriptural text: “For instance, it is frequently asserted in the Scripture, that God hath a similitude or shape, hath his place in the heavens, hath also affections or passions, as love, hatred, mercy, anger, and the like, neither is any thing to the contrary delivered there, unless seemingly in certain places, which neither for number, nor clearness are comparable unto those of the other side. Why now should I depart from the letter of the Scripture in these particulars, and boldly affirm with the generality of Christians, (or rather, with the generality of such Christians only, as being conversant with the false Philosophy that reigneth in the Schools, have their understandings perverted with wrong notions) that God is without a shape, in no certain place, and incapable of affections? Would not this be to use the Scripture like a nose of wax, and when of it self it looketh any way, to turn it aside at our pleasure? And would not God be so far from speaking to our capacity in his word, (which is the usual Refuge of the Adversaries [...]) as that he would by so doing render us altogether incapable of finding out his meaning, whilst he spake one thing, and understood the clean contrary? Yea, would he not have taken the direct course to make men substitute an Idol in his stead, [...] if he described himself in the Scripture otherwise then indeed he is, without telling us so much in plain terms, that we might not conceive amiss of him? Thus we see, that when sleep, which plainly argueth weakness, and imperfection, had been ascribed to God, *Psal.* 44.23. the contrary is said of him, *Psal.* 121.4. Again, when weariness had been attributed to him, *Isa.* 1.14. the same is expressly denied of him, *Isa.* 40.28. And would not God (think ye) have done the like in those forementioned things, were the case the same in them, as in the others?” Cf. later discussion in the main text, B3v-7r. Biddle’s influence on *De doctrina* seems to have been underestimated and deserves a detailed reconsideration. There is every reason to suspect that he is among those whom Milton has in mind when he says, in the Epistle, that has come to agree with the opponents “of those who are known as the orthodox [...] whenever those opponents agreed with the scripture” (*OW* 8: 5). Cf. the YP note to this sentence, comparing a similar statement in the life of Biddle prefaced to the 1691 edition of his *Apostolical And True Opinion concerning the Holy Trinity* (London, 1653), A2v-3r.

The importance of this passage was recognized already by the treatise's earliest nineteenth-century readers, and it has been cited and discussed extensively ever since, yet this discussion has often meandered unprofitably as critics, beginning with Sumner, attempted to conflate Milton's position with the very orthodoxy that he so emphatically attempts to subvert, or have recognized it as unorthodox, yet only at the expense of also deeming it inconsistent and paradoxical.<sup>44</sup> Not until comparatively recently did scholarship fully catch up with both the originality and the coherence of Milton's views, which emerge only in a careful consideration of the whole of his argument here, and its correlation with other relevant discussions in *De doctrina*, notably of the Son and his incarnation.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See Sumner's note to this passage: only "at first sight" does Milton appear to have "adopted one of the most ignorant errors of the dark ages of the Church"; Milton, *Treatise*, 18, n. 6. Not all early readers were convinced, however, and the above passage is among the most frequently extracted and criticized portions of the treatise. On the shock occasioned by the its publication, shattering, to the discontent of most, the previous consensus on Milton's religious orthodoxy, see Lieb, *Theological Milton*, 256-60. One of the most extensive of the early responses is by J. P. Smith, "On Milton's Treatise on Christian Doctrine", published serially in *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, n. s., 4 (1826): 50-3, 92-5, 137-40, 371-5, 463-6, 555-8: "A striking example of the power of poetical feeling, overbalancing the dictates of a cool and rigorous judgment, appears in our great author's opinion on the properties and affections of the Deity. [...] How did he come thus unhappily to stumble?" (92-4). Mid-twentieth-century critics worked hard at re-establishing Milton's orthodoxy on this crucial point: besides Frye, see esp. C. A. Patrides – "Accommodation"; *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford, 1966), 7-25; "Paradise Lost and the Language of Theology", in *Language and Style in Milton*, ed. R. D. Emma and J. T. Shawcross (New York, 1967) – and S. Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 202-3. For confluences with Neoplatonism, see J. H. Hanford, "That Shepherd Who First Taught", *UTQ* 8 (1939): 403-19, p. 415-17, an argument widely disseminated in Hanford's *Milton Handbook*, 4th ed. (New York, 1946), 226-8; more recently, M. Bryson, "Paradise Lost and the God beyond Names", in *Essays on the 1667 First Edition*, ed. M. Lieb and J. T. Shawcross (Pittsburgh, 2007). For criticism which sees the passage as contradictory, see A. D. Nuttall, *The Alternative Trinity* (1998; repr. Oxford, 2007), 151, and more recently, W. Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge, 2005), 192-3: "What [Milton] enables theoretically, he disables practically; what he accepts practically, he bans theoretically. The metaphysician and the fundamentalist talk at adds out of the same mouth".

<sup>45</sup> A decisive step forward appeared with H. R. MacCallum's "Milton and Figurative Interpretation of the Bible", *UTQ* 31 (1962): 397-415, the first study to clearly acknowledge the "unusually daring and thoroughgoing" nature of Milton's view: "Scripture [...] frequently depicts God as if he were a man. Is it possible that he really exists in such a form? Milton will not say. [...] We see God through the glass of Scripture, and whether that glass is transparent and colourless, or whether it is merely translucent, or possibly even warped and tinted, we cannot say" (401-2). This evades the inference of contradiction, but it also fails to do justice to Milton's comments on anthropopathy and Genesis 1:26; for MacCallum's later revision of his views, see n. 52. Other important early contributions include L. Ryken, *The Apocalyptic Vision in "Paradise Lost"* (Ithaca, 1970), 15-43, and W. Shullenberger, "Linguistic and Poetic Theory", *ELN* 19 (1982): 262-78. In "Reading God", *MS* 25 (1989): 213-43, revised in *Theological Milton*, 127-62, Lieb expands on Shullenberger's emphasis on the incarnation, demonstrates Milton's divergence from the orthodox view of accommodation and impassibility, gives a persuasive exposition of Milton's "theopathic" alternative (see following note) and the "divinization of the passible" it entails, and notes the implications of this for the representation of the deity in *Paradise Lost*. Of interest is Lieb's acknowledgement that he is writing against a wide-ranging consensus in Milton studies: "Although these assertions would appear to be self-evident, the state of Milton criticism at this time is such that Milton's God is still viewed more nearly as abstract principle than as fully realized character. [...] When Milton took this view to task in *De Doctrina Christiana*, it is almost as if he were responding to the future critics of his own poem" (*Theological Milton*, 152). Finally, see N. D. Graves, "Milton and the Theory of Accommodation", *SP* 98 (2001): 251-72, incorporating and refining all these insights, and the important paper by Killeen, which

To see contradiction here is to fail to grasp the distinction, crucial to Milton's thought, between anthropopathy and anthropomorphism and what should properly be called theopathy and theomorphism.<sup>46</sup> "God created man, and not vice versa."<sup>47</sup> The difference might seem immaterial: either way, we want to say, God has a human form. Yet that is precisely what Milton's counter-intuitive argument wants to banish from our thoughts. It is *man* who has a *divine* form. Anthropomorphism and anthropopathy, man's ascription of human form and behaviour to God, are grounded in the vagaries of human reasoning. Theomorphism and theopathy, however, are justified not only by unambiguous passages of scripture, but still more importantly, by what even Milton accepts as a "great [...] mystery", the incarnation of him whom "the Greeks in a single word most aptly call Theanthrōpos, 'God-man'", "in whose face invisible is beheld/ Visibly", "Substantially express'd" (*OW* 8: 188, 192; *Paradise Lost*, 3.140, 6.681-2). Consequently, as long as we do not stumble into anthropopathy, scriptural representations of God, in their plain, "literal" sense, afford us with "a true although incomplete representation of the transcendent deity".<sup>48</sup>

This has obvious and profound implications for Milton's much-debated representation of the deity in *Paradise Lost*, but it also illumines, to go back to the Skinner sonnet, that

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broadens the discussion into other directions, demonstrating the similarities between Milton's idea of accommodation in *Paradise Lost* "accords with natural philosophers and theologians, from Boyle to Burnet, who, uniquely in this late-seventeenth-century era, saw the Scriptures as compatible with their science. Accommodation [...] became the exegetical tool that allowed emerging scientific and philosophical ideas to meld with Scripture"; K. Killeen, "Accommodation in Burnet's *Sacred Theory* (1681) and *Paradise Lost*", *MS* 46 (2007): 106-22, p. 107; cf. P. Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge, 1998), 129-38.

<sup>46</sup> Lieb coins the term *theopatheia* to express the inverted logic of Milton's position: in anthropopathy, "God becomes an *imago hominis*, rather than man an *imago Dei*. Avoiding this trap, Milton advises against following the example of men, [...]; rather, he advocates following the example of God [...]. Having done away with *anthropopatheia*, he not only intensifies the idea of passibility but bestows upon it renewed significance. For lack of a better term, this new form of passibility might be called *theopatheia*" (*Theological Milton*, 146). The English equivalent, *theopathy*, is not recorded in the *OED*; the earliest example of *theomorphism* dates from 1822.

<sup>47</sup> Graves, "Theory", 270.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 259. This view is still by no means universally accepted. Recently, Sugimura and Raymond both fail to acknowledge the anthropopathy-theopathy problem and are thus driven into the fold of the "contradictionists": Milton's discussion is pervaded by a "rising anxiety" ending up in "fundamental contradiction" (Sugimura, *Substance*, 217); "Milton's argument winds through a familiar logic, until he endorses, beyond all doubt, the anthropopathy he originally rejected" (Raymond, *Angels*, 186). Some further discussions include W. G. Madsen, *From Shadowy Types to Truth* (New Haven, 1968), 73-84; C. G. Shirley, Jr., "The Four Phases of the Creation", *South Atlantic Bulletin* 45 (1980): 51-61; K. M. Swaim, "The Mimesis of Accommodation in Book 3 of *Paradise Lost*", *PQ* 63 (1984): 461-75; Treip, *Poetics*, 231-38, 278-81; J. Guillory, *Poetic Authority* (New York, 1983), 146-71; J. S. Shoulson, *Milton and the Rabbis* (New York, 2001), 93-134.

seemingly inconsequential postposited adjective in “human face divine”. The human face is not divine in some loose poetic sense, or the abstract sense in which all of God’s works are, by default, divine. Even in a monist ontology, in which all of creation is “one first matter [...]/ Indu’d with various forms”, the human form is unique. All forms are *from* God, but the human form is *of* God, a notion so important to Milton that he has Raphael stress it repeatedly in recounting to Adam the circumstances of his creation.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, if being deprived of the human face is terrible enough for an orthodox, glass-half-empty accommodationist, how much more terrible is the deprivation of the unorthodox, glass-half-full accommodationist like Milton, who genuinely believes this face is – in a limited, carefully qualified, but nevertheless decisively real and “literal” sense – the face of God? The difference emerges very clearly if we compare the analogous list in the sonnet to Skinner, written in the winter of 1655-56: three years after he went blind, and predating or just coinciding with the development of Milton’s monist views. Its abstractness is striking: the “idle Orbs” have been deprived of the sight “Of Sun, or Moon, or Starre throughout the Year;/ Or Man, or Woman”.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps Milton was simply not at his poetic best here, yet how much more felt and particularized is his later lament, not for the grandiose splendour of the heavens but such earthly, everyday blessings as a summer rose or a flock of grazing sheep, and not for a generic “Man, or Woman” but the transcendently theanthropomorphic “human face divine”. Indeed, it seems worth speculating whether we might have it backwards: whether it is really, as I have been suggesting, Milton’s

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<sup>49</sup> “Let us make now Man in our image, Man/ In our similitude, [...]/ This said, he formd thee, *Adam*, thee O Man,/ Dust of the ground, and in thy nostrils breath’d/ The breath of Life; in his own Image hee/ Created thee, in the Image of God/ Express, and thou becam’st a living Soul” (7.519-28). Elsewhere, Raphael also explicitly stresses that this extends to man’s outward form: Adam is, “Inward and outward both, [God’s] image faire” (8.221). Cf. H. MacCallum, *Milton and the Sons of God* (Toronto, 1986), 113-15: “All the works of God reflect his glory, [...] but traditionally those which are ‘images’ hold a pre-eminent position.” In the orthodox view, however – MacCallum cites Aquinas – the similarity resides in the faculty of reason, and the title is extended to “rational creatures, which imitate God through the possession not merely of being and of life, but of intelligence”. By contrast, Milton explicitly states the divine image “to shine ‘in [Adam and Eve’s] looks Divine,’ and the phrase suggests that it has a sensible and external manifestation. [...] Milton’s sense of the continuity of body and spirit allows him to handle the external aspects of the image more emphatically and with fewer reservations than most commentators; believing that ‘the whole man is soul, and the soul man’ [...], he does not share Calvin’s fear of the heresy of the anthropomorphites, who ‘were too gross in seeking this resemblance in the human body’”.

<sup>50</sup> According to Fallon, *Philosophers*, 96-9, Milton adopted his monist philosophy “by the late 1650s”.

monism that would have aggravated the trauma of his blindness, or whether it is the blindness that precipitated his monism?<sup>51</sup>

### WHAT HAPPENS IN *PARADISE LOST*?

Be that as it may, this is only one example of how the recovery of Milton's theological and philosophical views can transform our understanding even of the most unlikely aspects of his poetry. A more significant instance of the same shift in perspective is the problem of perceived allegory in *Paradise Lost*, especially in relation to the four particularly contentious domains of inquiry listed above. That an improved understanding of the intellectual background of this poem obviated the need for figurative readings was being realized already by the earliest readers of *De doctrina*, and certainly by 1855 Thomas Keightley found himself reading "a poem in which everything seems intended to be real", including such touchstone episodes as Sin and Death's passageway through chaos – for "who could say positively, after considering [...] Milton's idea of the reality of his cosmology, that he may not have conceived a material junction between hell and the exterior orb of the world?"<sup>52</sup> The excursus against anthropopathy made a particularly strong impression: Keightley cites it in its entirety, as affording "abundant proof of Milton's belief of the doctrine of plenary inspiration", which "his logical mind pursued [...] to its legitimate consequences", and which provided a solid theological basis for his representation of the deity. The same representation is now also found to reflect the Arianism of the treatise "in so plain and unequivocal a manner, that [...] one might wonder that every reader did not discern it" previously. Still other elements in the poem correspond, point for point, to notions expounded in or deducible from *De doctrina*,

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<sup>51</sup> As Fallon shows, Milton converted to monist views by the late 1650s, and we know he was totally blind by early 1652. In other words, he came to hold such highly unusual philosophical and theological views as would have infinitely increased his appreciation for the visible world after having lost his sight, and it seems reasonable to speculate whether his heightened awareness of its beauties, recollected in the "ever-during dark" of his blindness, played a part in this.

<sup>52</sup> T. Keightley, *An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton* (London, 1855), 411.

including Milton's fallible and extravagantly material angels, whom "he makes in most respects like man", or such episodes as the golden stairs of heaven, also "a reality".<sup>53</sup>

Since Keightley, numerous scholars have been discovering, and more often than not rediscovering, the same insights, even though an articulately literalist "school" of Milton criticism has never emerged, and could perhaps be only retrospectively reconstructed. However, if the representational status of Milton's God is still contested, efforts to de-allegorize Milton's angels have had much greater success, and even more importantly, seminal contributions to the understanding of Milton's personifications have been made in the 1970s and 1980s by Gallagher and Fallon, superseding virtually all previous scholarship on this subject, and posing a particularly formidable challenge to the allegorical view.<sup>54</sup>

Gallagher showed that Milton ascribed to a form of Christian euhemerism which explained pagan myths as distorted retellings of sacred history, both that recorded in the Bible, but also, and much more importantly for Milton's purposes, that deriving from extra- or pre-scriptural sources, notably the devils, who such "tradition [...] dispers'd/ Among the Heathen of thir purchase got" (10.578-9), but also human tradition extending, through the bottle-neck of Noah, to antediluvian times and ultimately Adam and Eve – or some amalgamation of these two options.<sup>55</sup> Such a view of ancient myth inverts and indeed dispels the more standard

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 158, 164-6, 451, 467, 483.

<sup>54</sup> See Gallagher, "Ontology", and S. M. Fallon, "Milton's Sin and Death", *ELR* 17 (1986): 329-50, slightly revised in *Philosophers*, 168-93. The debate on the poem's personifications, often undifferentiated from other perceived "allegory in the work, begins with Addison's *Spectator* papers, further discussed below. On eighteenth-century commentary, see S. Knapp, *Personification and the Sublime* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 51-65, and J. T. Shawcross, "Allegory, Typology, and Didacticism", in *Enlightening Allegory*, ed. Cope. The literature is extensive: in addition to studies mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, see A. Stein, *Answerable Style* (Minneapolis, 1953), 157-8; J. H. Summers, *The Muse's Method* (London, 1962), 32-70; I. G. MacCaffrey, "Paradise Lost" as "Myth" (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), esp. 179-206; A. Ferry, *Milton's Epic Voice* (1963; repr. Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 116-46; V. Kahn, "Allegory and the Sublime in *Paradise Lost*", in *John Milton*, ed. A. Patterson (Harlow, 1992); C. Gimelli Martin, "Approaches to Teaching *Paradise Lost* Allegorically", in *Approaches to Teaching "Paradise Lost"*, ed. P. C. Herman, 2nd ed. (New York, 2012). The chapter on "God" in Leonard's *Labourers* usefully surveys other aspects of the debate on Milton's representation of the deity, but Leonard has little to say, here or elsewhere, on questions of representation. On angels, see below.

<sup>55</sup> As Gallagher notes, Milton's euhemerist reconstructions are usually implicit, but several passages, such as the above comment on the myth of Ophion and Eurynome, give explicit voice to the doctrine. See also the narrator's comment on Hephaestus' fall from Olympus, said to be a distorted account of Satan's fall from Heaven: "thus they relate,/ Erring; for he with this rebellious rout/ Fell long before" (1.745-7). For further discussion, see also Gallagher's "Milton and Euhemerism", *MQ* 12 (1978): 16-23, and "Paradise Lost and the Greek Theogony", *ELR* 9 (1979): 121-48. For early anticipations of Gallagher's argument, see Addison, quoted in n. 193 below; Keightley, *Account*, 178. A flaw in Gallagher's work is his exclusive focus on the diabolic theory of the origin of the myths. Nowhere in *Paradise Lost* is any piece of classical tradition explicitly credited to extra-scriptural knowledge descended from Adam and Eve, but surely the reader is meant to come to this



procedure of Christian allegoresis of pagan myth, turning it into a source to be mined for insights into ancient history unrecorded, or recorded only partially or obscurely, in the Bible: “deeds”, as we read in *Paradise Regain’d*, “Above Heroic, though in secret done,/ And unrecorded left for many an Age” (1.14-16).

Bringing all this to bear on Sin and Death, Gallagher shows that Milton viewed the account of Athena’s birth from the head of Zeus in Hesiod’s *Theogony* as a distorted account of an event that really took place in ancient history, and poetically reconstructed this event as the birth of Sin from the head of Satan by correlating the Hesiodic myth, and its traditional allegorical interpretations, with the metaphors of James 1:15: “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sinne: and sinne, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” The problem with Gallagher’s argument is the extension of this into the much bolder claim that “Sin and her son Death are consistently real (i.e., physical and historical) throughout Milton’s major epic, their allegorical onomastics notwithstanding”, and furthermore, that this “extends to virtually all of [the poem’s] personages, places and images”.<sup>56</sup> Like Teskey, Gallagher fails to provide a persuasive explanation of how such beings as Sin and Death can exist on the same ontological plane as angels and, by proxy, humans.

Here we need to turn to Fallon’s equally important, and equally inconclusive, contribution to the debate, according to which Sin and Death are to be seen as allegorical representations of metaphysical evil, understood, in accordance with a tradition going back to Augustine and accepted in *De doctrina*, as the privation of the good, and consequently of being.<sup>57</sup> So while the privation of being is obviously unrepresentable in mimetic terms, it is

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conclusion, especially given the extensive tutoring of Adam by Raphael in Books 5-8 and Michael in Books 11-12. I omit a fourth theoretical possibility, that of pre-Adamite knowledge, an incendiary mid-seventeenth-century idea with which Milton was familiar, but which, whatever he may have otherwise thought of it, is entirely absent from his biblical epics; see Poole, *Idea*, 141-2.

<sup>56</sup> Gallagher, “Ontology”, 322.

<sup>57</sup> See Fallon, *Philosophers*, 168-93. In *De doctrina* Milton distinguishes between two “degrees or else parts or else modes” of sin, namely “evil concupiscence or lust for evildoing, and the evil deed itself”, and then goes on to note that the latter is “called Actual, not because sin is properly an action – since in reality it is a privation – but because it is usually involved in an action. For every action is in itself good: its irregularity or deviation from the rule of law is alone properly evil. Hence the action itself is not the material out of which sin [is made], but simply and solely the underlying thing and *hypokeimenon* in which [it exists]” (*OW* 8: 165-7). Fallon’s reading is partly anticipated by Summers: “Sin and Death remind us [...] that, despite all appearances, *all* the inhabitants of Hell approach nonentity: they represent a denial of proper being” and are thus “integral” to the poem (54-5, 70). For Summers, however, this includes, as he stresses here, Satan and the fallen angels, and by

singularly appropriate to dramatise it by inserting a non-mimetic, allegorical episode into an otherwise mimetic poem. What has been censured as a fault since Addison onwards thus turns into a virtue: “Taking advantage of the fit between allegory and nonentity in the seventeenth century, Milton in a virtuoso performance employs allegory to strengthen rather than violate the ontological coherence of the universe of *Paradise Lost*.”<sup>58</sup> While presenting an essential advance over prior discussions, Fallon’s argument does not, however, evade the objections initiated by Addison. If Sin and Death are allegorical embodiments of evil as privation of being, how can they converse with Satan? How can that which does not exist interact with that which, as Fallon himself labours to prove elsewhere in his study, does exist? As understood by Fallon, Sin and Death might be the least obstructive way for Milton to violate the ontological decorum of his poem, but he violates it nevertheless.

Gallagher and Fallon thus set the parameters for further investigation into this most vexed of the four main clusters of supposed allegory in *Paradise Lost*. Both critics comment on the crucial lines in Book 10:

Mean while in Paradise the hellish pair  
 Too soon arriv’d, *Sin* there in power before,  
 Once actual, now in body, and to dwell  
 Habitual habitant (10.585-8)

According to Gallagher, the lines show

how Sin was figuratively in the Garden before she literally arrived there. She occupies the place in three distinct ways: “in power” (i.e., potentially, before the Fall, because of Adam’s and Eve’s fallability [*sic*]; “actual[ly]” (i.e., spiritually, upon the completion of the original sin, which in Adam’s case was also an actual sin); and “in body” (i.e. physically, when she and Death bodily arrive there).<sup>59</sup>

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implication the whole of the poem’s supernatural “machinery”; Satan is “a personified actor” in a “persistent symbolic structure whereby all the major actions and emotions of human life are reflected, imitated, or parodied” (67, 70).

<sup>58</sup> *Philosophers*, 169.

<sup>59</sup> “Ontology”, 324.

Fallon disagrees, arguing that “in body” refers not to Sin’s bodily existence on earth, but to its existence as an accident in the substance of fallen man:

Sin is potential through human fallibility (“in power”), it is actually committed (“actual”), and it affects the sinner by depriving him or her of grace, righteousness, freedom, beauty, and other perfections (“in body”). Sin and Death are “in body” because they become accidents in man’s substance after the fall; they have no existence outside the fallen creature, only in his or her turning from God and the resulting spiritual deficiency and physical mortality.<sup>60</sup>

Between them, Gallagher and Fallon thus identify or imply three conflated sets of theological and philosophical binaries behind this crucial passage.<sup>61</sup> While it seems clear that Milton deliberately saturates these lines with such technical terminology, aiming at least partly and perhaps even mainly at satirical effect, I would propose that a coherent reading can still be established if we presume that Milton indeed did envision, in accordance with the orthodoxy to which he seems to subscribe in *De doctrina*, that sin and death can exist only as accidents in man’s substance *in this world*, but can in fact – yet another venture into philosophically and theologically uncharted territory prompted by his monism – assume substantial existence, as Sin and Death, in worlds ontologically alien to our own.

There is no room to mount a full argument here, but several details in the poem seem to support this hypothesis, notably the various descriptions of Sin, the only character in *Paradise Lost* who visits all the four major realms of the poem’s universe. Although

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<sup>60</sup> *Philosophers*, 189.

<sup>61</sup> Firstly, denoted by “Once actual”, the distinction between “actual” and “original” sin; secondly, denoted by “in body”, the distinction between “accident” and “substance” (thus Fallon, but see further discussion below); and thirdly, denoted by “in power”, another essential Aristotelian distinction, between “actuality” and “potentiality”. In addition, worth further consideration is the possibility of a fourth opposition at work here, triggered by the juxtaposition of the terms “actual” and “habitual”, which would add a topical and satirical dimension to the passage, namely that between “actual” and “habitual” grace, concepts which some Protestant commentators associated with Roman Catholicism and denounced as contrary to their views of justification by faith. See, for example, G. Downname, *A Treatise of Iustification* (London, 1633), B4r: “hence we may conclude against the Papists; first that neither their first, nor second justification, is that justification, which is taught in the Scriptures. Not the second, for that is not God’s action, but their owne: who being justified before by habituall righteousness infused from God, doe themselves as they teach, by practising of good workes increase their righteousness, that is, justifie themselves by actual righteousness, as the merit of their second justification.” This would fit with the other demonic inversions, which are a major structural principle throughout Milton’s biblical epics, and more specifically, with the travesty of orthodox Trinitarianism in the infernal trinity of Satan, Sin and Death; cf. Graves, “Trinity”.

commonly associated with hell, Sin is of course born in heaven, “at th’ Assembly, and in sight/ Of all the seraphim” (2.749-50), and her appearance there is strikingly divergent from her later appearance in hell. As born in heaven, Sin is not monstrous in shape, but rather, euhemerising Hesiod’s Athena, “a Goddess arm’d” (2.757). Furthermore, this radiant goddess is not a personification at all, but rather an ontologically unprecedented, prodigious being, born “in sight” of the unfallen angels and “call’d” by them: “back they recoild afraid/ At first, and call’d me *Sin*, and for a Sign/ Portentous held me” (2.759-61). Only subsequently, in hell, does Sin undergo a monstrous transformation analogous to that of the fallen angels. One way of looking at this is through the lens of the allegorist: sin is appealing at first, but is later revealed in its true colours. This is not, however, necessarily incongruous with a literal explanation of why Sin’s monstrous transformation takes place in hell, where, as Gallagher and Fallon both fail to mention, physical laws are not merely different from those of our world, but are inverse to those that govern divine creation.<sup>62</sup> Thus hell is precisely the sort of place where such beings as Sin and even Death – the “shape [...] that shape had none” (2.667), the very opposite of what is normally understood as existence – can truly, and thus in some sense substantially, exist.<sup>63</sup>

As a subordinate creation – created out of Satan’s own *created* substance, in perverse imitation of God’s creation from *uncreated* substance – Sin can temporarily exist in heaven. As infernal and infernally perverted substances, Sin and Death can subsequently subsist in hell, as well as in chaos, although that realm’s native denizens are of a still different and also anomalous order of being, phasing in and out of existence in a way that does not, and

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<sup>62</sup> Hell, we are told, is “A Universe of death, which God by curse/ Created evil, for evil only good,/ Where all life dies, death lives, and Nature breeds,/ Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,/ Abominable, inutterable, and worse/ Than Fables yet have feign’d, or fear conceiv’d,/ *Gorgons* and *Hydras*, and *Chimeras* dire” (2.622-8).

<sup>63</sup> The possibility Sin and Death’s substantial existence in hell seems to have at least crossed Fallon’s mind, but is discarded as “to grant Sin and Death independent substantial existence would be to confer divine creativity on Satan” (*Philosophers*, 188). This seems incontestable in so far as *independent* existence and *divine* creativity are concerned, but what if, as further discussed below, Milton also envisioned the possibility of *dependent* and *demonic* creativity, emanating *demonic* substance, a perverted emulation of divine creation capable only of illusion, monstrosity and paradox? In a final ontological analysis, even this substance would be divine, and even in hell “Nature” is at work, only in perverted form, because “God [...] created” it such.

presumably could not, occur in any other region of the universe.<sup>64</sup> However, in order to take possession of the earth, Sin and Death must undergo an alteration in their mode of being, even as their passage to earth alters the being of the cosmos – in reality, one and the same process, ordained by God, who employs both his angels and his “Hell-hounds” for executing different aspects of this transformation.<sup>65</sup> Here we return to the key passage, describing how Sin and Death arrive in Paradise and have their brief exchange there, still possessed of their monstrous forms:

Mean while in Paradise the hellish pair  
 Too soon arriv'd, *Sin* there in power before,  
 Once actual, now in body, and to dwell  
 Habitual habitant; behind her *Death*  
 Close following pace for pace, not mounted yet  
 On his pale Horse (10.585-90)

My reading vindicates Gallagher's interpretation of “in body”: the words really do refer to Sin's bodily existence in paradise, and are reinforced by the emphatically physical description of Death following in its footsteps, still possessed of a “Maw” and a “vast unhide-bound Corps” (10.601).<sup>66</sup> This does not, however, invalidate Fallon's view, denoted here not, as he supposes, by “in body”, but by “Habitual habitant”, the meaning of which is further specified

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<sup>64</sup> One of the most striking examples of just how methodically Milton conceptualized the ontological differences between his cosmic realms is the description of Chaos as of “faultring speech and visage incompos'd” (2.990). Here also a fuller investigation should be made into whether Milton is merely personifying an inanimate concept, or rather envisioning a form of existence suited to a cosmological domain memorably described as “without bound/ Without dimension, where length, breadth, & highth,/ And time and place are lost” (2.893-6).

<sup>65</sup> In their passage through the cosmos, Sin and Death deliberately choose the route that will cause most destruction in their path: “they with speed/ Thir course through thickest Constellations held/ Spreading their bane; the blasted Starrs lookt wan,/ And Planets, Planet-strook, real Eclips/ Then sufferd” (10.410-14). Modern commentators, uncomfortable with the materiality of what is described – Sin and Death hurling themselves into constellations, blasting stars and crashing planets into planets – seek to attribute the changes to astrological influence. Fowler, for example, glosses “blasted” as “breathed on balefully; influenced by a malign planet”, and “Planet-strook” as “stricken by an adverse planetary influence”, eliminating any material agency on the behalf of Sin and Death. The point, as Newton understood, is that such destruction as are usually attributed to adverse astrological influence is now being turned, by means of a superior force, on the very cosmic bodies which exert this influence: “We say of a thing when it is blasted and wither'd, that it is *planet-struck*; and this is now applied to the planets themselves. And what a sublime idea doth it give us of the devastations of Sin and Death!”; *Paradise Lost*, ed. T. Newton (London, 1748). Later on, God explains that it is by his bidding that “these Dogs of Hell advance/ To waste and havoc yonder World” (10.616-17), and dispatches angels to complete the process.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. W. B. Hunter, *The Descent of Urania* (Cranbury, 1989), 148, n. 50: Eve's sin “brought the capacity for sin into form or actuality; now Sin arrives embodied”.

by Sin only a few lines below: “I in Man residing” (10.607; cf. 10.815-6, “Death and I/ [...] incorporate both”). Instead of two options, we thus have three, precisely denoted in lines 10.587-8, specifying the past, present and future state of Sin on earth: she was “*Once* actual”, is “*now* in body”, and is “*to dwell*/ Habitual habitant”. Only *now*, in the brief interim of the fall – not before, not after, but precisely as it is taking place, as the very structure of the cosmos is being altered – can Sin and Death bodily exist in paradise.

Only *now*, and only in *paradise*. It is vital, I think, and apparently overlooked in previous criticism, that Sin and Death arrive and have their brief exchange in paradise rather than anywhere else on earth, because paradise is an ontologically anomalous region, governed by different physical laws from the rest of the planet.<sup>67</sup> However debased morally, in ontological terms Sin and Death are beings of an infinitely higher order than man even in his unfallen state. Not only can they subsist in chaos, from which man and his cosmos need to be protected by its impervious shell, but can harness and mould it. When loosed into the cosmos, they wreak destruction in their path. On earth, then, such monstrous beings can substantially exist only in the ontologically elevated oasis of paradise, whereas elsewhere they must suitably modify their mode of existence from substance to accident, and, as Satan explains already in Book 2, “dwell [...] unseen” (2.841). Consequently, after their brief exchange in paradise, Sin and Death dissolve into sin and death, accidents in the substances of living things – “This said, they both betook them several ways” (10.610) – and are not heard of again.

Finally, the possibility should be entertained that Milton also envisioned Sin and Death as a genealogy, in accordance with Gallagher’s euhemerist model, of Platonic idealism. The monstrous beings dubbed “Sin” and “Death” would thus be the origin of a false philosophy later spread by Satan, in keeping with the view that Satan perverted Christian

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<sup>67</sup> We have this in no uncertain terms from God’s own mouth, explaining that fallen man cannot be allowed “longer in that Paradise to dwell,/ The Law I gave to Nature him forbids:/ Those pure immortal Elements that know/ No gross, no unharmonious mixture foule,/ Eject him tainted now, and purge him off/ As a distemper” (11.48-57).

teaching by infusing it with Greek philosophy.<sup>68</sup> More specifically, Milton's euhemerizing account of Sin might be seen to focus on a particular variety of Platonic idealism, the "intradeical", where ideas are claimed to reside in, or to be identical with, the thoughts of God.<sup>69</sup> This is of great interest as intradeical idealism was traditionally aligned with Trinitarian theology, so that such a reading gives an additional layer to the elaborate satire of Trinitarian theology in the depiction of Satan, Sin, and Death, as compellingly reconstructed Graves' recent study.<sup>70</sup> Milton's early Latin poem, "De Idea Platonica quemadmodum Aristoteles intellexit" (On the Platonic Ideal Form as Understood by Aristotle), also uses the myth of Athena's cephalogony to ridicule Platonic idealism, and merits much more attention in this regard than it has hitherto received.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Here again an interesting parallel is found in Biddle, according to whom all those "Personalities, Moods, Subsistences, and such like brainsick Notions" of the Trinitarians "were first hatched by the subtilty of Satan in the heads of Platonists, to pervert the worship of the true God" (*Twelve Arguments*, B1v).

<sup>69</sup> See H. A. Wolfson, "Extradeical and Intradeical Interpretations of Platonic Ideas", *JHI* 22 (1961): 3-32; V. Boland, *Ideas in God according to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden, 1996).

<sup>70</sup> See N. D. Graves, "The Trinity in Milton's Hell", *MS* 52 (2011): 111-36. Graves, however, is too quick to dismiss Gallagher's euhemerism, which is perfectly compatible with his thesis; Milton satirizes Trinitarianism not through an allegory, but by giving a historical account of how intradeical idealism and its theological reverberations "actually" came into being. See also the note to lines 2.752-61 in Fowler's edition, who similarly recognizes in the generation of Sin a "travesty" and "distort[ion]" of the allegorical interpretations of the Hesiodic cephalogony as signifying the "two-stage logos" theology of the Son – the very position ascribed to Milton by Hunter, conclusively rebutted by Bauman, *Arianism*.

<sup>71</sup> Traditionally the poem has been viewed as a parody, Coleridge setting the tone for most subsequent commentary by seeing in it "not, as has been supposed, a ridicule of Plato; but of the gross Aristotelian misinterpretation of the Platonic Idea, or Homo *Archetypus*"; quoted in *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes *et al.* (New York, 1970–). Milton knew better, he was merely pretending not to. The *OW* editors perpetuate this view (*OW* 3: cxxiii), as does, in the final analysis, J. K. Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin* (Tempe, 2005), 33-65. Although Hale rejects the parodical reading, he still believes that Milton is merely giving his best shot at an obviously exploded thesis, in accordance with the practice of arguing both sides of a case; thus "Milton may be obtuse; but his university studies trained people to be obtuse in exactly this way (and for a purpose)" (65). Hale's explanation of Milton's underlying motivation – in thus obtusely criticising Plato's idealism, he is supposedly mounting an "ambush", "a defence of poets, against their greatest and most influential calumniator" (cf. *Variorum*, ed. Hughes *et al.*, on lines 37-9) – is forced and unpersuasive. In anticipation of a fuller examination in a separate study, I wish here only to draw attention to the striking resemblances between Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost* and "De idea", lines 7-24, asking who the archetypal man is supposed to be: "He is not the young twin of the virgin Pallas, an unborn child locked inside Jove's mind; but though his nature is universal, still he exists separately in the manner of an individual being and amazingly he is confined within a fixed spatial limit. Whether as the stars' eternal companion he traverses the tenfold spheres of heaven or inhabits the moon's globe, nearest the earth: [...] or whether perhaps in some distant region of the earth he advances as a huge giant, the original form of humankind, and rears his lofty head thereby frightening the gods, taller than star-bearing Atlas." The birth of Sin is thus modelled on the very myth which Milton uses here to criticize (intradeical) Platonic idealism. As he moves on to other theories, the resemblances continue: after the fall, sin and death are "universal", accidents in substances, but before the fall they are, "amazingly", Sin and Death, existing "separately in the manner of [...] individual being[s]", "huge giant[s]", "monsters" (l. 36). We similarly see them "traverse" ("pererrat"; Hale has "roves") the cosmos (although no longer a Ptolemaic one) in the illusion that their actions are "frightening the gods". Commentators present no direct parallels for the monstrous physicality of the description, which is perhaps indicative of a curiously materialist streak in Milton's imagination, long predating and anticipating his monism. Of potential interest here is Hale's argument, not

Similar reasoning would seem to underlie most of the minor episodes of supposed allegory in the poem, which are typically based on a conflation of classical and scriptural motifs, and whose apparent figurative dimension either resolve into unproblematic literal readings, or turn out to be restricted to the poem's non-mimetic, rhetorical overlay. A good example of both these processes is found in the golden scales episode at the end of Book 4. The episode is obviously modelled on the motif in classical epic, which had been allegorically interpreted since ancient times.<sup>72</sup> However, a careful reading of Milton's passage leaves little doubt that the only scales which "happen" within the poem's mimetic universe are the stars composing the constellation Libra. In order to prevent the battle between Satan and the guardian angels, God

Hung forth in Heav'n his golden Scales, yet seen  
 Betwixt *Astrea* and the *Scorpion* signe,  
 Wherein all things created first he weighd,  
 The pendulous round Earth with balanc't Aire  
 In counterpoise, now ponders all events,  
 Battels and Realms: in these he put two weights  
 The sequel each of parting and of fight;  
 The latter quick up flew, and kickt the beam (4.997-1004)

What *happens*, then – as opposed to what is merely *said* – is that God either creates or arranges previously existing stars into the image of an unbalanced scale, thus creating what has henceforth been known as the constellation Libra (or perhaps rearranges the stars of the already extant constellation from a balanced to an unbalanced position). Gabriel sees this, realizes what it portends, and tells Satan to “for proof look up,/ And read thy Lot in yon

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adopted by the *OW* editors (*OW* 3: cxxii-cxxiii), that “De idea”, as we have it, does not quite fit with the relevant university genres and contexts, and is thus not to be equated with printed act verses mentioned in the 1628 letter to A. Gil (*YP* 1: 313-14), but rather that it and “Naturam non pati senium” (That Nature Does Not Suffer Decay) “*began* life as act verses, which they resemble at more points than they differ; but that they have *developed* past that set form, to something more personal and expressive” (36) – in other words, that the subject, although commissioned, struck a genuine intellectual and poetic chord in Milton, the same that would, years later, lead to his conception of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*.

<sup>72</sup> For an example, see Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems*, ed. D. A. Russell and D. Konstan (Atlanta, 2005), 13.



celestial Sign/ Where thou art weigh'd", leading Satan to disengage from the conflict, having "lookt up and knew/ His mounted scale aloft" (4.1010-14).

This is not allegory. When Homer and Virgil have Zeus and Jupiter weigh the fates of their warriors in golden scales, they offer no comparable rationalization, cosmological or otherwise, and one must eventually be sought through allegoresis. With Milton, however, we are explicitly told that they are no scales at all: "yet seen" in its said position in the night sky, the constellation is a permanent "celestial Sign" of God's judgement, and by synthesizing several strands of pagan and Christian tradition, Milton corrects pagan myth and astrology – the golden scales of classical epic are revealed to be a distorted, literalized account of the metaphoric depictions of God's weighing in several places in the Old Testament<sup>73</sup> – even as he gives a true account of the origins of a familiar cosmological phenomenon.

A similar rationale can be discerned behind another ostensibly "allegorical" episode, the "mysteriously [...] meant" golden stairs extending from the aperture at the top of the cosmos to the gate of heaven. Roaming across the outer shell of the cosmos, Satan

farr distant [...] describes

Ascending by degrees magnificent

Up to the wall of Heaven a Structure high,

At top whereof, but farr more rich appeerd

The work as of a Kingly Palace Gate

With Frontispiece of Diamond and Gold

Imbellisht, thick with sparkling orient Gemmes

The Portal shon, inimitable on Earth

By Model, or by shading Pencil drawn. (3.501-9)

We are in fact never told, and the narrator does not pretend to know, what it is that Satan sees, except in the broadest, functional outlines. There is thus "a Structure", leading up, in

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<sup>73</sup> See Job 28:25, "To make the weight for the windes, and he weigheth the waters by measure"; Job 37:16, "Doeest thou know the ballancings of the clouds"; Isa. 40:12, "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand: and meted out heauen with the spanne, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance"; and Dan. 5:27, "thou are weighed in the balances, and art found wanting".

increments, to a “Portal”, which is comparable (“as of”) to a magnificently ornamented palace gate, but is not fully comprehensible through such comparisons.<sup>74</sup>

Milton does not want us to imagine actual stairways and palace gates in deep space, but neither does he want us to take these images allegorically. Rather, he wants us to entertain the prospect that there really exist, outside of our cosmos, subject to different physical laws, and thus largely, but not wholly, beyond our understanding, material structures which are functionally comparable to stairways and gates. These limited insights are gleaned from a careful rationalization of key elements – notably the “ladder” and the “gate” – in Jacob’s dream.<sup>75</sup> There is *something* out there in the universe functionally analogous to these, but the reason is physical rather than symbolic. The cosmos is subject to same stable physical laws that we still daily experience, but outside it lies the volatile realm of chaos, which even Satan traverses with the greatest difficulty. There is thus a real need for a “structure” to facilitate movement between the cosmos and the empyreal heaven, just as for the analogous conduit through the “unvoyageable Gulf” (10.366) from earth to hell, variously referred to as

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<sup>74</sup> On Milton’s use of similes in such places, see esp. Murrin, *Epic*, 365-6, discussing the description of heaven at 3.344-415, specifically the mention of the angels’ “shout” being “sweet/ As from blest voices”: “A simile should clarify; these finally do not. [...] It could be read as tautology, for we know the angels are blessed and we are talking of their shout. More likely, however, the *whatever* of the angels resembled *somehow* many happy voices. Otherwise why say that the shout was only *like* to the noise made by voices, except to remind us that angels are not human and do not have voices in the normal sense of the term? The simile asserts difference perhaps as much as similarity. [...] The more similes Milton uses, the stranger the scene becomes.” See also Murrin’s discussion of the extensive use of similarly inconclusive similes in the opening chapter of Ezekiel (164-6). Murrin takes the argument too far, however – in which he is followed by Sugimura – when he argues that Milton uses such devices to stage *total* epistemological abnegation.

<sup>75</sup> “And he dreamed, and beholde, a ladder set vp on the earth, and the top of it reached to heauen: and beholde the Angels of God ascending and descending on it./ And behold, the LORD stood about it [...]/ And [Jacob] was afraid, and said, how dreadful *is* this place: this is none other, but the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heauen” (Gen. 28:12-17). In keeping with the principles of scriptural exegesis outlined in *De doctrina*, and probably also consulting Protestant commentaries on the passage, Milton accepts this as divine revelation, and as it is a dream vision – and moreover, at 28:17, a report and interpretation of a dream vision, a further remove from the divine reality it represents – he feels warranted in exploring its figurative implications. Cf. *The Dutch Annotations* (London, 1657), according to which the “house” and “gate” of 28:17 refer to “a place where God dwelleth in a singular manner, to declare and reveal himself unto men, by speaking to them, and to be spoken unto by men, praying to and worshipping of him; whereby they may from hence, *as by a gate*, ascend up into heaven, to converse with him” (emphasis mine). How closely Milton scrutinized these motifs is best indicated by his dismissal of a particularly prominent aspect of the ladder, explicitly said to extend from “earth [...] to heauen”. This, Milton apparently deduces, is a concession to the figurative aspect of the vision, and therefore feels justified in extending his extrapolated “Structure” only to the aperture at the top of the cosmos.

a “beach”, “Mole”, “Bridge”, “passage”, “ridge”, “way”, “Pontifice”, “Rode”, “Causey” and “Highway” (10.299-415, and Argument to Book 10).<sup>76</sup>

Only now, only once all this has been established, does Milton make a reference to “Stairs”:

The Stairs were such as whereon *Jacob* saw

Angels ascending and descending, [...]

Dreaming by night under the open Skie

And waking cri'd, *This is the Gate of Heav'n*. (3.510-15)

Again, however, the simile leads nowhere: we have no idea what the stairs of Jacob's vision were like, and not only because the vision is figurative, but also, as Milton would have doubtless known, because the Hebrew word in question, *sullām*, is a *hapax legomenon* of

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<sup>76</sup> There is, however, no need for such conduits through the cosmos, and it is doubtful – consider again the effects which the intrusion of the ontologically alien beings of Sin and Death leaves in its wake – whether they could even exist within it. The juncture at which the “Structure” meets the “op’ning” is presumably to be identified with its “bounds”: “So wide the op’ning seemd, where bounds were set/ To darkness, such as bound the Ocean wave” (3.538-9). Arguing that Milton's cosmology intentionally resists a fully rational explanation, Ittzés notes this as one of the places where “analysis breaks down and becomes meaningless”, for if we read the lines in purely rational terms, “chaos would violently pour” through the aperture, “flooding and drowning whatever is inside”; see G. Ittzés, “Structure of Milton's Universe”, in *Centuries*, ed. Ittzés and Péti (Budapest, 2012), 36. The problem with this reading, however, is not that it is excessively, but insufficiently rational. We know that, except at the “op’ning”, the cosmos is enveloped in a “firm opacous Glove” protecting it “From *Chaos* and th' inroad of Darkness old” (3.418-19); we also know that, for this same reason, there is a “Structure” to facilitate movement between heaven and earth; the logical conclusion must be that the “bounds” at 3.538 refer to whatever means by which the “Structure” attaches to the “op’ning”, paralleling the “beach” by which Sin and Death “fasten” their passageway to hell (10.298-300). Their precise nature is again left unexplained: they are “such as bound the Ocean wave”, another pseudo-simile extending merely to their function. Incidentally, the “Glove” is probably “opacous” because it is “firm”. Milton's is neither a magical universe, in which one might encounter an invisible barrier unaccountably resistant to the laws of nature, nor the universe of modern science fiction, where one might encounter an invisible but non-magical “force field”. To his reasoning, matter sufficiently strong to withstand chaos must be extraordinarily dense, and consequently opaque, at least to human and angelic sight. Even though “thir Power was great”, Sin and Death cannot simply conjure their conduit to hell, but must create it out of highly compacted chaotic matter: “what they met/ Solid or slimie” they “together crowded drove”, creating “aggregated Soyle”, which is further hardened by Death's “Mace petrific, cold and dry” (10.284-93). A similar process formed the outer shell of the cosmos by compacting the “Ethereal quintessence of Heav'n” (3.716) – if the circular “walles [of] this Universe” at 3.721 are identical, as they seem to be, with the “firm opacous Glove” of 3.418. The Richardsons, *Explanatory Notes and Remarks* (London, 1734), were the first to propose that Milton got the idea of a solid and opaque envelope from the passage in Lucretius describing how the firmament was formed when “the light and expansive ether, with coherent body, bent around on all sides [*corpore concreto circumdatus undique flexit*], and expanded widely on all sides in every direction, thus fenced in all the rest with greedy embrace”; see Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 5.467-70. “*Concretus*”, Leonard explains, “(from *concreresco*, ‘grow together’) means ‘hardened’”. The idea is that fluid particles coalesce to form a solid structure: finer than modern industrial concrete, but a genuine “firmament” (*Labourers*, 719). If this is so, then both the deity and its antipodes build chaos-resistant structures in basically the same way, only from appropriately opposing materials: God from ether, Sin and Death from slime. Consequently, for anyone but God, whose “eye/ Views all things at one view” (2.189-89), to enter or even see into the cosmos, there must be an “op’ning”, adjoining to the “Structure” ascending to the “Portal”.

unclear meaning, of which the Septuagint's *klimax* and the Vulgate's *scala* are merely traditionally accepted interpretations.<sup>77</sup> Milton clearly thrived on such ambiguities, which bore scriptural authority even as they opened the prospect for daring speculation. From verse 3.510 onwards, then, we pass from mimesis to diegesis, from a philologically grounded conjecture about aspects of deep-space cosmology to a vignette prompted by the traditional interpretations of Jacob's vision.<sup>78</sup>

Room for discussion is limited, yet the above should suffice to prove that Milton did not, as Johnson would famously accuse, confuse spirit and matter. He did, however, walk a tightrope between the mimetic and the rhetorical, and if he occasionally wavered, failing to demarcate between the two as clearly as we might have wished him to, he did make it to the other side. This does not mean, to pre-empt an obvious objection, that there is no figurative significance to his golden stairs or his golden scales,<sup>79</sup> but for the most part this meaning is successfully quarantined to the poem's rhetoric rather than its mimetic action. It is allusion, properly speaking, rather than allegory. This does not mean that there are no figurative dimensions to Milton's universe. Clearly Milton envisaged the creation as imbued, especially in its unfallen form, with symbolic significance, and early in his career he could even use the

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<sup>77</sup> See, for example, the discussion in V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50* (Grand Rapids, 1995): "The Hebrew word here is *sullām*, which occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible. Many commentators have connected *sullām* with the verb *sālal*, 'heap up,' and accordingly suggest for the noun something like 'ramp' or 'stairlike pavement.' More likely is the suggestion that Heb. *sullām* is to be connected (through metathesis) with Akk. *simmltu*, 'stairway.'" An interesting detail in Hamilton's discussion is his dismissal of the argument against the traditional translation "ladder" – one does not go up *and* down on a ladder at the same time – as based on "a modern, rationalistic concern than a linguistic observation. If we wish to be completely modern and rationalistic, then we need to isolate the issue in terms not of 'ladder' versus 'stairway,' but why angels would need either one!" I propose that this is precisely the question Milton asked himself. Cf. G. N. Conklin, *Biblical Criticism and Heresy in Milton* (New York, 1972), on the importance of the Hebrew terms *nephesh*, "soul", and *bara*, "create", to Milton's doctrines of mortalism and creation *ex Deo*.

<sup>78</sup> That the stairs are "mysteriously [...] meant" is certainly a nod to the traditional commentary on the vision, and as further discussed below, it is possible that Milton would have condoned allegoresis of such overtly non-mimetic passages of scripture. But these interpretations – and it seems indicative that we are never actually offered any – relate to the vision as recorded in Genesis, not to the cosmological extrapolation from aspects of that vision in Milton's epic. For a survey of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century interpretations, see C. A. Patrides, "Renaissance Interpretations of Jacob's Ladder", *Theologische Zeitschrift* 18 (1962): 411-18. Patrides is wrong in saying, and thereby insinuating Milton's supposed orthodoxy, that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theologians universally, "to a man", allegorized the ladder as Christ. To take a notable example, this and any such allegorical interpretations are completely bracketed from the treatment of the vision in *The Dutch Annotations*.

<sup>79</sup> Or the other golden things in his poem: the golden hinges of the gate of heaven (5.253-6, 7.205-7), Michael's golden sword (6.320-34) – not actually said to be golden in *Paradise Lost*, but a "sword of gold" in Milton's source, 2 Macc. 15:15-16 – the golden compasses (7.224-231), and the golden altar (11.15-20).

term *allegory* in this context.<sup>80</sup> If, however, we extend the notion of “allegory”, as Treip and Borris do, to the point where reality itself can be termed “allegorical”, then it must follow that any artistic representation, of any subject, by any person who subscribes to such a view of reality, is “allegorical” by default, which obviously creates more problems than it solves. Simply put, “if allegory is everywhere, it is nowhere”.<sup>81</sup> Beliefs which may be particularly conducive to allegory – that the world is structured in terms of analogies or correspondences, or that all Christian believers enter a state of mystical union with Christ – cannot be equated with allegory itself. Allegory is not a belief or a worldview, and it is a simple fact of literary history that allegorical literature and art have been practiced independently of any such notions as Treip and Borris appeal to.

Such terminological problems point to deeper conceptual dilemmas. Critics argue for “allegorical” readings of Milton’s epic, yet do not employ the term in a way consistent with seventeenth-century Protestant usage, to which, as discussed below, Milton adhered in the final decades of his career. In fact, the term is used in ways which, in stressing the supposedly non-mechanical and non-hierarchical nature of allegory, directly contradict the understanding of this notion by the Milton who composed *De doctrina* and *Paradise Lost*. Recently, for example, Borris cites Rosemond Tuve’s view of allegory – we must not “suffocate” it “with the tightly drawn noose of inflexible equations, but allow meanings to flow into and inhabit the literal so that it is symbolic also” – adding that he has “always read allegory this way, rather than in ‘levels,’ and [...] assumed that this procedure can be taken for granted among early modern literary scholars, as common knowledge since the 1960s”.<sup>82</sup> If, however, “the main bulk” of *Paradise Lost* is “allegorical, without being one whit less ‘real’ in its historical component”, with “metaphor and symbol passing more explicitly into allegory [...], but one that is enclosed with in an external framework of historical realism” – if Milton’s is a “meta-

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<sup>80</sup> See below, pp. 272-5

<sup>81</sup> Anderson, *Reading*, 7.

<sup>82</sup> K. Borris, rev. of *Structures of Appearing*, by B. Machosky, *The Spenser Review* 43 (2014), unpaginated e-text. For the quoted passage, see R. Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery* (Princeton, 1966), 353. As further discussed in the Afterword, statements like this expose the degree to which the late twentieth-century rehabilitation of “allegory” testifies to the continuing dominance of the very Romantic and modernist aesthetics which it nominally seeks to counter.

allegorical” and “subliminal ‘allegory’”, “dialectically transcending conventional allegory’s segregation of literal and figurative registers” – if we insist on the term’s “conceptual breadth” and its tendency to “complexity, multiplicity, openness, contradiction, and subversion”, to the point where discourse lacking such features “is simply not allegory” – if, in other words, the concept can be made useful only by emptying it of precisely those traits that had previously differentiated it from such neighbouring concepts as *metaphor* and *symbol* – then what is gained by holding on to it?<sup>83</sup> This is one of the central questions underlying the ensuing sections of this chapter, which examine the emergence and development of allegorical readings of Milton’s poem, and which must begin with a re-examination of what exactly this term, *allegory*, meant and connoted to Milton and his contemporaries.

### THE SATANIC “OR”

Towards the end of *Paradise Regain’d*, Satan claims that he has consulted the stars in order to foresee Christ’s future: “A Kingdom they portend thee”, he says, “but what Kingdom,/ Real or Allegoric I discern not” (4.389-90). The lines go without substantial commentary in most editions of the poem and the overall import of the passage is clear enough: Satan either genuinely fails to comprehend the true significance of the kingdom, or only pretends to do so in another futile effort to tempt Christ. The place is of interest, however, for being the only instance in the whole of Milton’s poetry where not only the concept of what might be called allegory is invoked, but where a form of the actual word, *allegory*, is employed. What, if anything, is to be made of this? Is it significant that the single time Milton uses the term *allegory* in all of his literary work, it is put into the mouth of Satan – and if so, what is the significance?

According to almost all previous commentary on the passage, the answer is no: Satan’s word-choice is relatively unimportant and “Allegoric” should here be taken in a broad sense indistinguishable from such neighbouring concepts as “figurative” or “typological”, or

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<sup>83</sup> Treip, *Poetics*, 251; Martin, *Ruins*, 42-3; Anderson, *Reading*, 7, 292.

perhaps simply as the opposite of “real”, i.e. “unreal”, “imaginary”.<sup>84</sup> But if nothing more is intended, then why choose this technical, confessionally sensitive and otherwise methodically avoided term over various other, unproblematic possibilities? The same question is to be addressed at more recent readings by critics who approach Milton’s epics as fundamentally allegorical in character, and who therefore have a particular interest in defusing the potentially unpleasant implications of the passage. Thus according to Treip, in what remains the most extensive commentary on these verses,

Satan uses the term “allegoric” here partly in a general sense of “figurative” or metaphorical, partly (with unconscious or ironic allusion to the Old Testament tradition of messianic prophecy) in the older theological sense of “typical” (typological). [...] What is most intriguing about Satan’s statement is its either/or aspect. If the kingdom is “real” it cannot be figurative, and if it is figurative then it cannot be “real”; the two have to be mutually exclusive. Yet in traditional scriptural multi-layered reading and certainly in typological reading such was not the case. The historical or “literal” level of truth remained always perceived in the background, and in typology directly present. Type and antitype are both historically real, while they both also participate in a kind of mutual correspondence [...]. Both are “real” *and* simultaneously “allegoric”.<sup>85</sup>

Satan is an allegorist, then, but he is a *bad* allegorist, and by “ironically expos[ing]” his “narrow literal-mindedness” Milton is instructing us how correctly to approach allegorical literature, including, supposedly, his own allegorical epics.

Anticipated by mid-twentieth-century studies that had presented Satan as ‘the arch-literalist’ in the poem, Treip’s reading in turn anticipates more recent arguments along similar lines, for example by Anderson, who reads “Real or Allegoric” as “yet another of Satan’s pernicious, simplistic binaries, [...] equat[ing] allegory with abstraction, fable, and Idea alone,

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<sup>84</sup> The latter, for example, was the view of Frye – “for Satan the material is real and the spiritual is imaginary or, as he says, ‘allegoric’” – and is the gloss adopted in the *Variorum*: “*Allegoric*. Figurative [...] and hence unreal”. See N. Frye, “The Typology of *Paradise Regained*”, *MP* 53 (1956): 227-38, p. 213; *Variorum*, ed. Hughes *et al.*

<sup>85</sup> Treip, *Poetics*, 171-2.

ignoring its defining doubleness”.<sup>86</sup> Such readings have an advantage over earlier ones in foregrounding the potential interest in the use of “Allegoric”, but they still fail convincingly to account for the unique and thus presumably deliberate usage of this theologically and politically sensitive term. However attractive to some modern critics, the idea of allegory as defined by a non-reductive “doubleness”, or of the term being used interchangeably with *figure* or *type*, would have been deeply problematic to many seventeenth-century Protestant readers, and all the evidence suggests that Milton is to be counted among them, at least as far as the final three decades of his career are concerned.

Against this prevailing opinion that the usage in *Paradise Regain’d* is either insignificant or reflects, through ironic contrast with Satan’s misuse of the term, Milton’s own predilection for allegory, I propose that exactly the opposite is the case – that the usage *is* significant and that it is significant precisely because it reflects Milton’s *hostility* towards allegory.<sup>87</sup> In order to substantiate this reading, this section examines the usage of the term *allegory* in Milton’s early writings and its abandonment from 1645 onwards, his familiarity with the disputes regarding Galatians 4:24, a biblical verse of central importance in early modern disputes on the subject, and what might be called the satanic allegory topos – an overlooked tradition in Protestant commentary according to which allegorical reading was invented and introduced into Christian tradition by Satan, in order to obscure the true meaning of scripture. Having firmly aligned Milton with the anti-allegorical tendency in Protestant thought, the discussion returns to *Paradise Regain’d* to demonstrate how this anti-allegorism informs a number of passages in the poem, notably Satan’s often quoted but imperfectly understood “Real or Allegoric”. There is much more to this than previous criticism has

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<sup>86</sup> Madsen, *Types*, 193; Anderson, *Reading*, 273. Confusingly, Anderson back-tracks on this later in the same chapter: “Satan’s sin”, we now read, “overwrites Edenic monism with metaphorical tension, which, when continued, becomes openly allegorical. [...] We enter Eden with Satan and never see it without an awareness of his predatory, allegorical presence, which both narratively and conceptually frames the initial description of Adam and Eve. His very presence brings doubleness and perceived dualism with it” (293-4).

<sup>87</sup> For a partial exception to the dominant view, see Flannagan’s note: “Milton’s use of the word, juxtaposing it with ‘Real,’ suggests that he had indeed rejected allegory as a valid mode [...], at least at this point”; *The Riverside Milton*, ed. R. Flannagan (Boston, 1998). Flannagan further dilutes the claim by adding that “Milton’s customary use of the word relates it to biblical types [...] and hence is not pejorative”, citing his description of Revelation in the 1641 *Animadversions*: “the whole Booke soares to a Prophetick pitch in types, and Allegories” (YP 1: 714). As further discussed below, this is problematic not only because of Milton’s later avoidance of the term, but also because of the special status accorded to the Book of Revelation regardless of confessional divides.



acknowledged: what we are meant to be witnessing here is the very birth of Christian allegoresis, the precise moment at which this method of interpretation, which would go on to make such a profound impact on the ensuing history of Christianity and indeed the world at large, first emerges in history.

The principal context for such an understanding of the passage is the tendency within Protestant hermeneutics to dismiss, at least nominally, allegorical interpretation of the Bible in favour of an approach which may be exemplified by Milton's own opinion on the subject in *De doctrina Christiana*: "The sense of each scriptural passage is single; in the Old Testament, though, it is often a compound of the historical and typological" (*OW* 8: 389).<sup>88</sup> This is not to say that either the concept of allegorical reading, or even the term *allegory* itself, were simply anathema to every single Protestant commentator. In practice things were rarely as simple as definitions like Milton's made them seem, and Protestant interpreters often resorted to readings which can be plausibly described as allegorical, even if they preferred not to call them so, especially with those books of the Bible that were generally considered to be particularly esoteric in their mode of expression.<sup>89</sup> Alternatively, one could still employ the term, provided certain restrictions or qualifications were clearly acknowledged: for example, on the condition that the allegorical interpretation was proposed within the scriptural text itself, or that the allegorical sense was defined as a subset or aspect of the one literal sense rather than a separate sense in its own right, or that it was not understood as the actual sense or meaning of a scriptural text at all but merely its homiletic application – or any combination

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<sup>88</sup> As has long been acknowledged, the passage is taken over from J. Wolleb's *Compendium theologiæ Christianæ* [1626] (Cambridge, 1642), A7v; translation in *The Abridgment of Christian Divinitie* (London, 1650), B5v. Cf. *Of Reformation*: "the Scriptures [protest] their own plainness and perspicuity" (*YP* 1: 566); *Of True Religion*: "Scripture, which by a general Protestant Maxim is plain and perspicuous abundantly to explain its own meaning in the properest words" (*YP* 8: 425).

<sup>89</sup> A good example here is Wilson's dictionary (in its early editions), which covers the whole of the Bible but is particularly concerned with, and includes "perticular" dictionaries for, the most "Mysticall" books, namely the Song of Songs ("a continuall Allegorie"), the Epistle to the Hebrews (containing "Types and Figures"), and Revelation ("which hath as many Mysteries, as words"); see T. Wilson, *A Christian Dictionarie* (London, 1612), A3r-v. In his entry for *allegory*, however, Wilson repeats the conventional Protestant warning: "it is a safe thing to tread in the steps of the holy ghost, not making Allegoricall sences, where the Spirit hath made none".

of these and still other available loopholes, most of which had been around, in various permutations, since medieval or even early patristic times.<sup>90</sup>

In theory, however, the distinction was for the most part clear: to do “allegory” is to posit multiple senses, and to posit multiple senses, especially when this denies, or is perceived to deny, the historical reality of the persons and events signified by principal or literal sense, is to replace the true sense of scripture by man-made fabrications. By contrast, mainstream Protestantism taught that the scripture has only a single, literal or historical sense, although the characters and events thereby signified may, especially in the Old Testament, prefigure those of a later time. Indeed, the fact that in actual practice the difference between allegory and typology was often blurred probably only encouraged a “narcissism of small differences”, making such theoretical and terminological distinctions vital to the construction and preservation of confessional identities. As a result, *allegory* became – again, not universally and unequivocally, but to a considerable degree nevertheless – a branded word and a focus of extensive, complex and often acrimonious debate.

The contradictions and vacillations inherent in the Protestant position in this debate may be illustrated by the use of *allegory* and its derivatives in Milton’s own prose writings of the early 1640s. Even at this date the term is rarely used: only seven instances are found, of which two are irrelevant here, as the term is employed in a purely literary or rhetorical sense.<sup>91</sup> This is the case with one of the three instances found in passages added to the 1644 edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (YP 2: 223) and the single instance in *De doctrina*, occurring in a disclaimer issued early in the chapter on predestination: “of assignment to life – if one must rely on metaphors and allegories in so contentious a matter – frequent mention is made, and of the book of life, but none anywhere of the book of death” (OW 8: 25-6). This has been cited as evidence of Milton’s acceptance of scriptural allegoresis, yet the term *allegory* is here clearly meant in the rhetorical rather than the hermeneutical sense, and the

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<sup>90</sup> For engaging overviews of this problematic, see Harrison, *Bible*, 129-38; B. Cummings, “Protestant Allegory”, in *Allegory*, ed. Copeland and Struck.

<sup>91</sup> Not counting the citation of the title of Philo’s *Legum allegoria* in the first *Defence* (CW 7: 78).

passages in question are all revealed to be extensions of the simple metaphor of the “book of life” (“this figure of writing”) into a series of related metaphors.<sup>92</sup>

There are thus, in addition to *Paradise Regain'd*, five relevant instances of the term *allegory* in the whole of Milton’s work: one in the 1641 *Animadversions*, already discussed above (n. 87), one in the 1642 *Reason of Church-Government*, two in the 1644 *Doctrine and Discipline*, and one in the 1645 *Colasterion*. Each of these displays a different facet of Milton’s engagement with the term and its various aspects and connotations. In *Church-Government* we find him distinguishing between a valid and an invalid allegorical interpretation, as he sees them, ridiculing his opponents for attempting “to straine us a certaine figurative Prelat, by wringing the collective allegory of those seven Angels into seven single Rochets” (YP 1: 778, see note). In *Doctrine and Discipline* he similarly engages with a previous allegorical reading by Philo, but this time implying an understanding of allegory as a homiletic application of scripture rather than its actual meaning – apparently Philo’s interpretation is not so much wrong, as Milton’s is “haply more significant” (YP 2: 288).<sup>93</sup> The other instance in the same work is of interest for designating as “allegorick” not passages of scripture or any other text, but what he terms “precepts of beneficence fetcht out of the closet of nature” (YP 2: 273).

Of particular significance is the instance in the *Colasterion*, where Milton is responding to criticism and is therefore particularly explicit about his methodology and its underlying premises. The obviously opportunistic interpretation in question, turning two agricultural precepts at Deuteronomy 22:9-10 into precepts against joining incompatible personalities in marriage, was first proposed in *Doctrine and Discipline*, where it is not called allegorical (YP 2: 270). It was then challenged in some detail in the anonymous *Answer* to Milton’s treatise, and it is in responding to this rebuttal in the *Colasterion* that he refers to the

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<sup>92</sup> Indeed, the disclaimer is prompted by Milton’s own use of such a metaphor (following Isa. 4:3), for “assignment to life” is really “*ascriptione* [...] ad vitam” (emphasis mine). The metaphorical quality of two other scriptural passages referred to similarly turns on the root verb *scribere* and is thus partially lost in translation: Ps. 69:28, “*not enrolled with the righteous*”, is “*cum iustis ne conscribantur*”; Jude 4, “*marked down for this judgment*”, is “*praescripti ad hoc iudicium*”. For this passage used as evidence of Milton’s allegorism, see Treip, *Poetics*, 182.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. the appreciative reference to Philo in the first *Defence* (CW 7: 78; cf. YP 4: 344-5, n. 16-17).

Deuteronomy verses as “*allegorical*” (YP 2: 751).<sup>94</sup> On both occasions he goes to great lengths to maintain that he is following the best Protestant practice in discerning such a meaning: he is not acting on his own impulse, twisting an allegory out of an otherwise intelligible passage to suit his polemical interests, and he is not discerning this allegory by his own fallible intellect but is merely clarifying what is already suggested elsewhere in the scripture.

Be that as it may, it is to be strongly emphasized that the chief relevance of all this in approaching Satan’s ‘Real or Allegoric’ in *Paradise Regain’d* lies in its irrelevance. At most, these examples show that at an earlier stage in his career Milton occasionally used the term in his non-literary work, in senses which range from the purely rhetorical or literary to those display a keen awareness of the strictures placed on figurative interpretation in Protestant hermeneutics. None of this, however, to go back to Flannagan’s comment, can be taken as an example of Milton’s ‘customary’ use of the term. Rather, what is customary, especially in the last three decades of Milton’s career, is precisely the term’s *disuse*. Even though the writings from this period account for the majority of hermeneutical terminology found in Milton’s work, the word *allegory* virtually disappears from his vocabulary.

The five relevant instances of *allegory* are put into perspective by over a hundred instances of comparable terminology elsewhere in the prose, notably in *De doctrina*.<sup>95</sup> In the poetry, the widest range of such terminology is found in *Paradise Lost*: we hear of “types”, “shadowes”, and “shadowie Types” (1.405, 12.232-3, 12.303), of things “mysteriously [...] meant” or presented “in mysterious terms” (3.516, 10.173), of events “foretold” and “Oracle[s] [...] verifi’d” (10.182, 191), of actions undertaken “in figure” (12.241) of those to

<sup>94</sup> See *An Answer to a Book, Intituled, The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. (London, 1644), F4r-G1r.

<sup>95</sup> Most frequently Milton uses *typus* (OW 8: 45, 311, 350, 353, 389, 432, 434, 552, 571), but also *adumbrare* (67, 86), *accommodare* (10), *dicere* (109), *exhibitio* (338), *figurare* (348), *illustrare* (290), *intelligere* (99-100), *manifestatio* (306), *obscuritas* (81, 140, 312), *parabola* (151), *repraesentatio* (101), *res certissima* (356), *sensus compositus* (389), *sensus duplex* (49, 389), *sensus metaphoricus* (49-52), *sensus theologicus* (125), *significatio*, *significare* (99-100, 339, 356), *signum* (339, 435), *symbolus* (142, 307), *tropus* (81), *umbra* (307, 571), or such phrases as “sub nomine [...] intellige” (7), “more prophetico [...] significari” (67), “prophetici [...] libri stylus” (81), “sub [...] specie administrata” (101), “humano [...] more ait” (132), “obscurius [...] percipitur” (305), “ex charitati[s] sensu [...] interpretantur” (329), “per externa [...] signa repraesentatio” (330). The term is also avoided in the Prolusions (CW 12: 128, 130, 150, 248). Instances in the English prose include *figure*, *foreshow*, *foresignify*, *mystery*, *pattern*, *shadow*, *type*; see the entries in *A Concordance to the English Prose of John Milton*, ed. L. Sterne and H. H. Kollmeier (Binghamton, 1985).

come, of accounts related “By lik’ning spiritual to corporal forms” (5.573), of understandings passing “from Flesh to Spirit” (12.303), of texts “not but by the Spirit understood” (12.514) – but not of *allegory*. Except for *Paradise Regain’d*, Milton never used the term in its hermeneutical sense after 1645. Adapting a passage in Wolleb where *allegoria* is listed among the types of figurative language which cannot be charged with falsehood, he removes it from the list.<sup>96</sup> The simplest explanation for this is that he came to view the term as controversial and joined many of his fellow Protestants in using it sparingly or abandoning it altogether.

Just how controversial the term could be is vividly illustrated by an event from December 1655, when an Englishman was sent to prison for believing that the Bible was to be read allegorically. Admittedly, this particular Englishman, the itinerant nonconformist preacher Richard Coppin, harboured many other curious beliefs and had been preaching about them for several months in Kent, before he was finally examined, found guilty of breaching the 1650 Blasphemy Act, and sentenced to six months’ imprisonment.<sup>97</sup> Besides believing that the Bible was an allegory, Coppin also believed that there was no local heaven or hell, that baptism, good and bad deeds were equally irrelevant to salvation, that God will destroy the sin but not the sinner, and most importantly, “*That all mankind, Jew or Gentile, and what ever they are, how ever they live, or dye, shall be saved*”.<sup>98</sup> But if these sound like far graver blasphemies than Coppin’s hermeneutics, they are often premised precisely on his allegorical readings of scripture, and it is no coincidence that of the twenty-five articles of his arraignment, it is the very first that reads: “*That all the Scriptures is but an Allegory, that is all, said he, both Law and Gospel, and that it is nothing but an Allegory, said he, it is clear from Gal.4.24.*”<sup>99</sup>

Coppin’s position was undoubtedly radical, yet it is still instructive in several ways: it shows that the question of scriptural allegoresis was not merely a theological but also a deeply

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<sup>96</sup> See Wolleb, *Compendium*, M11r: “Schemata, Metaphoras, Allegorias & similia, mendacia non esse”; cf. *De doctrina*: “parabolas, hyperbolas, apologos, ironias mendacia non esse” (*OW* 8: 655-6).

<sup>97</sup> See N. Smith, “Coppin, Richard”, *ODNB*.

<sup>98</sup> R. Coppin, *A Blow at the Serpent* (London, 1656), M7r.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, M4r.

political and even, in such extreme circumstances, legal matter; it reminds us that scriptural allegoresis was not, in Protestant eyes, associated exclusively with Papist but also with nonconformist heresy; finally, it exemplifies the central importance of the scriptural passage to which Coppin appealed, Galatians 4:24. It is to this passage and the controversies which surrounded it that we can now turn for further insights into attitudes towards scriptural allegoresis held by Milton and his contemporaries. The reason why the passage was so important is simple: it contained the only use of a form of the word *allegory* in the whole of the Bible. At this place in the epistle, Paul not only gives an arguably allegorical interpretation of the account of Abraham's sons in the Book of Genesis, but explicitly calls it "allegorical": *hatina estin allegoroumena*, "all of which is spoken allegorically", which had for centuries been rendered by the Vulgate as *Quae sunt per allegoriam dicta*, "Which things are said by an allegory".<sup>100</sup> As might be expected, Roman Catholics and nonconformists like Coppin cited this place in support of their allegorical interpretations, while their claims were wholly or partially disputed by their Protestant opponents.<sup>101</sup>

Graphic testimony to these disputes is found in the early English translations of the verse (Table 1). In spite of the fact that some form of the English word *allegory* was the obvious choice for rendering Paul's *allegoroumena*, and that both the Vulgate and Erasmus rendered it by the Latin *allegoria*, Tyndale and Coverdale refuse to let this word into their renditions, translating, respectively, "Which thing[es] betoken mistery" and "These wordes betoken somewhat".<sup>102</sup> Tyndale's version survived when his text of the New Testament was included in the 1537 Matthew Bible and the Tyndale-Erasmus diglot edition of 1538, the latter affording a particularly explicit instance of the conflict, with Tyndale's English,

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<sup>100</sup> *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. B. and K. Aland *et al.*, 28th rev. ed., rev. L. Herren *et al.* (Stuttgart, 2012); *The Vulgate Bible*, ed. S. Edgar and A. M. Kinney (Cambridge, Mass., 2010-13). The precise meaning of *allegoroumena*, a New Testament *hapax*, remains disputed, with the arguments of modern commentators often reiterating those reaching back to Milton's day and far beyond. The above translation is from H. Balz and G. Schneider, *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1990), who add that the type of interpretation in question is "more accurately" to be identified as "typological allegorizing". Other "allegory"-based renderings in modern commentaries are similarly counterbalanced by the insistence that Paul's "allegory" does not deny the reality of the historical events in question, raising the question of how this "allegory" is to be distinguished from what is more readily described as typology. For criticism on this ground, see A. T. Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology* (London, 1974), 91-101.

<sup>101</sup> In addition to the examples below, see T. H. Luxon, *Literal Figures* (Chicago, 1995), esp. 77-101.

<sup>102</sup> Coverdale's rendering shares "betoken" with Tyndale's, while the rest is markedly similar to Luther's, "Die wort bedeuten etwas"; *Das Neue Testament Deütsch* (Wittenberg, 1522).

“Whiche thynges betoken mistery”, directly facing Erasmus’s Latin, “que [*sic*] per allegoriam dicuntur”. A change occurs, however, in another diglot edition of the same year, printing a new translation by Coverdale parallel with the Vulgate, in which this verse is revised to include, for the first time in an English version, the word *allegory*: “[the] which thynges are spoken by an allegory”. This reading is then retained in Taverner’s Bible, the Great Bible and the Bishops’ Bible, and is repeated in substance in the King James Bible.<sup>103</sup>

The Great Bible continued to be printed in the reign of Edward VI, alongside further allegory-free renditions of the Galatians verse. The so-called Becke’s Bibles – revisions of the Matthew and Taverner versions produced between 1549 and 1551, apparently by the staunchly Protestant Edmund Becke – revert back to Tyndale’s version. Around 1552, Richard Jugge’s revision of Tyndale’s New Testament offers another vivid illustration of the conflict: the text is still Tyndale’s, “Which thynges betoken mystery”, but a marginal note adds that “Some read: whiche thinges are spoken in an allegorye”.<sup>104</sup> In 1557, the translation of William Whittingham, a Marian exile in Geneva, gives “By the which thinges another thing is me[n]t”, a rendering adopted three years later in the Geneva Bible, as well as in Laurence Tomson’s 1576 English translation of Theodore Beza’s Latin version of 1565.

Predictably, the Rheims New Testament of 1582 responds to Geneva’s provocation not only by translating *allegory* but also appending a note adducing the passage as scriptural warrant for allegorical reading. Equally predictably, this note receives an extensive rebuttal by Fulke, who allows the story of Abraham’s sons a typological significance – it is “a figure or paterne of the Church to come” – but insists that the passage in no way presents a warrant “to

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<sup>103</sup> The influence of Erasmus’s translation, which reaffirmed the reading of the Vulgate, must have been considerable. It was first printed in England in the Tyndale/Erasmus diglot in 1538, and the fact that the Coverdale/Vulgate diglot, the first to use *allegory* at Gal. 4:24, appeared in the same year might indicate such influence. The expanding treatment of the verse in the editions of Erasmus’s *Annotations* reflects the ongoing debates: the original edition of 1516 contains only a brief note, giving a conventional definition of allegory as saying one thing and signifying another; the 1522 edition adds a reference to Augustine’s *On the Trinity*, where it is insisted that Paul’s “allegory” is not one of words but deeds, and is thus effectively equated with typology; the 1535 edition adds to this a reference to Chrysostom’s commentary: “Contrary to usage, he calls a type an allegory”; see *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament: Galatians to the Apocalypse*, ed. A. Reeve (Leiden, 1993); Augustine, *On the Trinity, Books 8-15*, ed. G. B. Matthews (Cambridge, 2002), 183; *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians and Homilies on the Epistle to the Ephesians of S. John Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople*, rev. ed. (Oxford, 1879).

<sup>104</sup> *The newe Testament of our Sauour Jesu Christe* (London, [1552?]). For the inverse procedure, see the Bishops’ Bible, which gives “by an allegorie” in the text, but adds in the margin, “By an allegorie, that is another thyng is meant”.

“Which thing[es] betoken mistery” Tyndale’s NT, 1526	“[the] which thynges are spoken by an allegory” Coverdale/Vulgate NT, 1538
“These wordes betoken somewhat” Coverdale’s Bible, 1535	“Which thinges are spoken by an allegorye” Taverner’s Bible, 1539
“Which thynges betoken mystery” Matthew Bible, 1537	“Which thynges are spoken by an allegorye” Great Bible, 1539
“Whiche thynges betoken mistery” Tyndale/Erasmus NT, 1538	“Whiche thinges are spoken by an alligorie” trans. of Erasmus’s <i>Paraphrase</i> , 1549
“Which thinges betoken mysterye” Becke’s Bible, 1549	“Whiche thynges are spoken by an allegorie” Bishops’ Bible, 1568
“By the which things another thing is me[n]t” Whittingham’s NT, 1557	“which things are said by an allegorie” Rheims NT, 1582
“By the which things another thing is ment” Geneva Bible, 1560	“Which things are an Allegorie” King James Bible, 1611
“By the which things another thing is me[n]t” Beza’s Latin NT, trans. Tomson, 1576	“ <i>Are an allegorie [...] have an allegoricall sense</i> ” Diodati’s <i>Piovs Annotations</i> , 1643
“Which are things that have another signification” <i>Dutch Annotations</i> , 1657	“Which things are an allegory” Westminster Annotations, 1645

Table 1. Some early English translations of Gal. 4:24, divided into those which avoid and those which employ the term *allegory*. The editions cited, in chronological order, are *The New Testament: A Facsimile of the 1526 Edition*, trans. W. Tyndale (London, 2008); *Biblia. The Bible that is, the holy Scripture* ([Antwerp], 1535); *The Byble which is all the holy Scripture* ([Antwerp], 1537); *The newe Testament in Englyshe & in Latin* (London, 1538); *The newe testament both Latine and Englyshe* (Southwark, 1538); *The Most Sacred Bible* (London, 1539); *The Byble in Englyshe* ([London], 1539); *The Byble, that is to say all the holy Scripture* (London, 1549); *The seconde tome or volume of the Paraphrase of Erasmus vpon the newe testament*, [trans. M. Coverdale and J. Olde] (London, 1549); *The Nevve Testament of Ovr Lord Iesus Christ* (Geneva, 1557); *The Bible and Holy Scriptvres Conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament* (Geneva, 1560); *The holie Bible* (London, [1568]); *The Nevv Testament of Ovr Lord Iesvs Christ Translated ovt of Greeke by Theod. Beza*, trans. L. Tomson (London, 1576); *The Nevv Testament of Iesvs Christ* (Rheims, 1582); *The Holy Bible* (London, 1611); Giovanni Diodati, *Piovs Annotations* (London, 1644); [M. Casaubon *et al.*], *Annotations* (London, 1645); *Dutch Annotations*.



draw the Scriptures from the sense of the wordes which you call the literall sense, to any allegoricall interpretation, which is fayned and counterfected in mans brayne, and hath no ground of the spirit of God”.<sup>105</sup> Fulke’s moderate position seems typical of many Church of England divines: he follows the reading of the Bishops’ Bible and takes no quarrel with the use of the term *allegory* as such, yet insists that “the Apostle in this place vsing the terme of allegory, meaneth no such descanting vpon the Scripture” as Catholic interpreters indulge in, that “prefigurations differ much from allegoricall interpretation”, and that even “if we should admit that the apostle, who was certeine of the sense of the Holy ghost, did make an allegorical interpretation, yet it is not lawfull for euery man”, who “hath no such assurance”, to do so.

There can be no doubt that Milton was aware of these variant readings and the disputes they reflected. Not only were they present in the two major vernacular versions, the Geneva and the King James Version,<sup>106</sup> but also in Latin and polyglot editions, including the version of the New Testament that Hale and Cullington (*OW* 8: xlvii-li) identify as the one principally consulted by Milton in composing *De doctrina*, namely Beza’s, in the Geneva edition of 1598, printing the Greek, the Vulgate and Beza’s own Latin translation in parallel columns, with Erasmus’s translation sometimes supplied in the notes. Against all these, Beza’s translation of Galatians 4:24 still reads, as it did in the original edition of 1556, ‘Per quæ aliud figuratur’.<sup>107</sup> The 1598 edition also contains features that would have lent further prominence to the passage, including additions to the already extensive commentary on the

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<sup>105</sup> W. Fulke, *The Text of the New Testament of Iesvs Christ, translated ovt of the vulgar Latine by the Papists of the traiterous Seminarie at Rhemes... with A Confytation* (London, 1589).

<sup>106</sup> Even after the KJV reading became predominant it was still occasionally contested, for example in the 1657 translation of the Dutch *Statenvertaling* Bible commissioned by the Westminster Assembly (*The Dutch Annotations*). Even before Haak’s translation appeared this particular note had already been borrowed in the Westminster Annotations of 1645 (Casaubon *et al.*), where, however, the KJV text is given: “Which things are an allegory”.

<sup>107</sup> *Iesv Christi Domini Nostri Nouum Testamentum, siue Nouum fædus* ([Geneva], 1598); cf. *Novvm D. N. Iesv Christi testamentum* ([Geneva], 1556). Beza explains his choice as striving for “perspicuity” – “allegorical discourse” is “completely fictional”, whereas Paul’s text is a “true history”, albeit one “adumbrating” a “hidden mystery” – but his statements elsewhere voice his deep aversion to allegory in less diplomatic terms. For the Old Testament and the Apocrypha, Milton is said to have relied primarily on the 1623-24 Hannover edition of the Junius-Tremellius-Beza Bible: *D. N. Iesv Christi Testamentvm Novum* (Hannover, 1623), *Testamenti Veteris Biblia Sacra* (Hannover, 1624). This included Tremellius’ translation from the Syriac, “Hæc autem sunt allegoriæ”, alongside Beza’s “Per quæ aliud figuratur”.

verse and even a schematic representation of Beza's clarification of Paul's "allegory" (Figure 7).

Abrahamus, duplicis fobolis  
αἰνεσιχου pater, ex duabus iti-  
dem αἰνεσιχου: vxoribus.

TYPVS.	ΣΥΝΕΙΧΗ.	VERITAS.	TYPVS.	ΣΥΝΕΙΧΗ.	VERITAS.
Agar ancilla, & extra- nea gentis, nempe ex Sina monte Arabiæ.		Pactio legis, in Sina monte latæ.	Sara ingenua, ex gen- te sancta.		Euangelij pactio.
Ismael seruus, ex matre ancilla, secundum carnē, id est naturali vi ordina- ria genitus, ideoque cum suis posteris, vtpote ser- uis, ab hæreditate exclu- sis.		Hierosolyma terrestris, id est Iudæi quærentes iusti- tiam ex lege, ideoque non hæ- redes.	Isaac ingenuus & ex ingenua matre secun- dum promissionem, id est ex virtute Dei ex- traordinaria genitus, cum suis posteris, iusti- tiam, ex Euangelij pa- cto, per fidem quæ- ratibus.		Hierosolyma cele- stis, id est Iudæi secun- dum promissionem fi- de apprehensam geni- ti, & iustitiam quære- tes, in Christo per fidē apprehenso, ideoque hæredes.

Figure 7. Beza's schematic representation of Paul's interpretation in the 1598 edition. Similar schemes are given for only two other passages, Rom. 7:1-6 and 2 Cor. 5:1-10; cf. J. Krans, *Beyond What Is Written* (Leiden, 2006), 279.

What did Milton make of all this? The banishment of the word *allegory* from his post-1645 vocabulary gives us one clue and further evidence is found between the lines of a quotation of Galatians 4:24 he gives in *De doctrina*. Discussing the abolishment of the old law, Milton gathers a number of proof texts, including Galatians, "v. 24, about Hagar and Sarah: *these women are those two covenants: [...] Hagar [...] producing offspring for slavery; the other, v. 26, [...] is free; hence v. 30: cast out the slave-girl and her son, for in no way shall the slave-girl's son be an heir with the freewoman's son*" (OW 8: 320).<sup>108</sup> Obviously the quotation is highly elliptical, as are most of the thousands of biblical references and

<sup>108</sup> This quotation agrees with Beza's 1598 edition ("duæ illæ pactiones"). There is another reference to the passage in *De doctrina* (OW 8: 326) and another brief quote, "Gal. 4. 24. *duo pacta*" (OW 8: 312), which agrees with the 1623-24 JTB version ("duo illa pacta"), so we know that Milton looked up the passage in both versions. The banishment of Hagar is also mentioned in the 1644 *Doctrine and Discipline* (CPW 2: 263), but without any reference to its figurative dimension.

quotations which make up for half of the text of *De doctrina*. On closer view, however, it becomes clear that there is a particular logic behind the truncations which cannot be wholly ascribed to economy. Not only does Milton fail to cite the beginning of 4:24, containing the troublesome *hapax*, but he avoids using any hermeneutical terminology on his own part, limiting himself to the utterly indifferent *about* and *hence* and letting the whole weight of the interpretation to fall on Paul's seemingly innocuous but in fact highly significant *are*.

The significance of this *are* becomes clearer in the light of Milton's discussion of sacramental language in the following chapter of the treatise. The discussion is occasioned by the treatment of the Lord's Supper, which inevitably revolves around the interpretation of the words attributed to Christ in the Synoptic Gospels and 1 Corinthians 11:24-5, notably the key phrase, "this is my body". In keeping with Reformed orthodoxy, and drawing on Wolleb, Milton argues that these words and similar sacramental expressions elsewhere in the Bible are to be taken figuratively and vehemently dismisses the doctrines of transubstantiation and consubstantiation (*OW* 8: 354). However, he also steers clear of the other extreme – that sacramental expressions are *merely* figurative – arguing that they employ a special mode of figuration not encountered in other types of discourse.<sup>109</sup> Specifically, sacramental figuration is the same in *kind* as that employed in other contexts, but not in *degree*: "in the case of the sacraments [...] the relation between signifier and the thing signified is very close [*summa*]', and sometimes even closer, for 'it seems the biblical writers used this manner of speaking to signify not only a very close [*summam*] correspondence between signifiers and the things signified, but also an absolutely sure sealing of spiritual things [*certissimam rerum spiritualium obsignationem*]" (*OW* 8: 354-6).

This and other finer points in Milton's treatment of the sacraments are beyond the scope of the present study, but the remainder of this passage is of direct relevance to the truncated quotation from Galatians. "Hence", he continues, "the same way of speaking has

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<sup>109</sup> Whereas Milton explicitly dismisses the literalist view, his avoidance of the opposite extreme can only be inferred, but see Wolleb again, arguing "against those who cry out that we have nothing in the Sacraments but empty signes"; *Abridgment*, K7r. If, as I propose, the same logic underlies Milton's discussion at this point, then the editorial insertion of a "merely" in the following passage flattens the subtlety of his position: "sacraments by themselves confer neither salvation nor grace, but [merely] either seal or symbolize each of these benefits for believers only" (*OW* 8: 356).

also been transferred to the signifying of all other absolutely sure things [*res certissimas*]: Gen. 41: 27: *the seven cows [...] are seven years...*; Rev. 1: 20, and 17: 9: *the seven heads are seven mountains*; and v. 12: *the ten horns [...] are ten kings*". While the preceding examples all relate to covenants and sacraments, these do not. Rather, they resemble sacramental expressions in being instances of esoteric figurative interpretations or analogies found within the biblical text itself and explicitly adduced through the use of the copulative verb – exactly what we find at Galatians 4:24.<sup>110</sup> In other words, the introduction of this terminology, which is Milton's own intervention into his principal source in Wolleb, presents yet another Protestant strategy to "rebrand" traditional modes of esoteric hermeneutics, including those which could be plausibly described as allegorical.<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, there were various sources where Milton could have found the notions of sacramental language and the sacramental copula related directly to Galatians 4:24. The search for expressions comparable to *hoc est corpus meum* began in the early days of the eucharistic controversy, and at some point the Galatians verse began to be cited in this context.<sup>112</sup> Eventually, through this association, the converse also began to apply: not only was Galatians 4:24 used in illustrating sacramental language, but the notion of sacramental

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<sup>110</sup> Apparently it is this use of the copula which makes them "absolutely sure" rather than just "very close". Cf. Wolleb, *Abridgment*, sig. L1r: "it is not material whether the trope be in the attribute, or in the copula, or coupling of the words: for though the trope may be in the attribute, yet the cause or ground of the trope is in the copula". Milton, it would seem, is not entirely convinced and prefers to have a category for those instances where the presence of the copula leaves nothing is left to the interpreter's own inference. The examples bear out this interpretation: those preceding the above passage include both instances which do and those which do not contain the copula, whereas the four examples of "other absolutely sure things" all contain it.

<sup>111</sup> This becomes even clearer if we take a closer look at Milton's sources here. The last quoted passage from *De doctrina* rewrites the following one in the Wolleb's *Compendium*: "Yea, the very same is seen in other speeches besides sacramental; as Gen. 41. 37. *The seven cows, are seven years*; that is, types and figures [*typi & figuræ*] of seven years: Rev. 17. 9. *The seven heads, are seven hills*; and v. 12. *The ten horns are ten Kings*" (Wolleb, *Abridgment*, L1r; *Compendium*, F3v). Milton keeps the examples but removes the phrase "other speeches besides sacramental" and the reference to the contents of the pharaoh's dream as "types and figures", presumably because he finds such usage erroneous: types are historical figures and events and not elements in dreams or visions. But if these are neither sacraments, nor seals, nor types, nor figures, nor allegories – and note here that at an earlier period Milton was not averse, as he now seems to be, to employing the latter term with regard to Revelation – then what are they? They are *res certissimas*, and vague as that may be, it does the job of avoiding the controversial term *allegory*, while at the same time foregrounding the divine assurance for the interpretations adduced in such passages.

<sup>112</sup> For an example in English, see *A Fvll Declaration of the Faith and Ceremonies Professed in the dominions of the most illustrious and noble Prince Fredericke* (London, 1614), G2r-v: "this manner of reasoning, when one saith, *This is this or that*, hath often this meaning; as if one would say, *this betokeneth this or that*, or which is to one effect, [...] *This is a token and sign of this or that*. For example: [...] of *Hagar and Sarah*: *These are the two Testaments*. These speeches can no otherwise be vnderstood then as if hee had said: [...] *Hagar and Sarah betokened the old and the new Testaments*".

language became a gloss for Galatians 4:24. Milton would have seen the verse glossed in similar terms by Beza, and possibly elsewhere as well.<sup>113</sup> Although the verse is not mentioned among Milton's examples of "absolutely true things" it clearly falls under this category, and if this is the thinking he brought to bear on it when quoting it in *De doctrina*, it makes perfect sense that he would skip the opening words and proceed directly to the part containing the 'sacramental' or 'absolutely sure' copula, eliding the controversies that had accumulated around the passage. The quotation thus testifies, albeit in negative form, to Milton's familiarity with these controversies, which would have been very prominently brought to his attention when he looked up this passage in the two principal Bible texts that he used and any other versions or commentaries he might have consulted. That he chose to pass over these disputes here is not surprising: a work aimed, in his view, at further consolidation of orthodox Protestant doctrine rather than polemic with "the Pontificians" was not the place for a judicious treatment of such a complex and controversial yet ultimately non-doctrinal matter (*OW* 8: 3-4).<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> See the note in Beza's 1598 NT, which does, however, instruct the reader to distinguish between "sacramental" and "typical" signification: "*Sunt, εἰσιν. Id est, figurant & adumbrant, sicut dicitur Petra fuisse Christus, & Panis dicitur corpus Christi*", etc. Cf. *The Dutch Annotations*: "are [that is, signifie, betoken, represent. A sacramental phrase. See *Gen.* 41. 26. 27. *Matt.* 26. 26.]"; James Fergusson, *A Brief Exposition of the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (London, 1659): "So is it in the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper, [...] and so it is here, [...] *Those are the two Covenants*".

<sup>114</sup> Finally, it is important to keep in mind that Milton considered the text of the New Testament to be highly "corrupt" and that he might have, as he did in several other cases, questioned the authenticity of the unique use of *allegoroumena* at Galatians 4:24 (*OW* 8: 59-60, 73, 109-10, 396-8). If he also took the trouble of consulting the verse in B. Walton's *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* (London, 1657) he would have found additional motive for such suspicion. Walton's polyglot gives nine texts here: the Greek, the Vulgate, the Syriac, the Arabic and the Ethiopic, with all the non-Latin texts accompanied by Latin translations. The Latin versions of the beginning words of Galatians 4:24 offer a predictably inconclusive array of readings: "Quæ sunt *allegorizata*" (from the Greek) and "Hæc autem sunt *allegoriæ*" (from the Syriac) vs. "Hæc autem duæ sensum habent cujus narratio ineffabilis est" (from the Arabic). Most interestingly, however, the translation from the Ethiopic gives nothing, jumping from its rendering of the final words of 4:23, "& quæ è libera secundum promissionem", directly to "Et hæc sunt duo testamenta", and thus omitting any text corresponding to the disputed words in the Greek. One can only speculate, but Milton's decision not to quote the part of 4:24 that is (to the best of his knowledge) lacking in at least one version of great antiquity and authority, is translated with significant variations here and in other renditions, and contains, in the 'corrupt' Greek, a very important *hapax legomenon*, seems entirely compatible, and may be indicative of, his doubts about its authenticity. Cf. Milton's reference to the Ethiopic version in his dismissal of the Johannine Comma (*OW* 8: 59). Milton's esteem for the Ethiopic text would have been influenced by the fact that Walton attributed great antiquity to it, believing it to have been translated "from ancient Greek exemplars close to the apostolic age"; *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*, "Prolegomena", Bb2v. His knowledge was almost certainly limited to the translation in Walton's edition; see Fletcher, *Use*, 88. Milton's familiarity with Walton's polyglot was first demonstrated by H. F. Fletcher, *The Use of the Bible in Milton's Prose* (Urbana, 1929), 86-8; cf. *OW* 8: lx, 237, n. lxi.

There is, however, a further and compelling reason to believe that this is the context in which Satan's "Allegoric" is to be taken, namely the term's long-standing association with the devil in Protestant commentary. The tradition apparently begins with Luther, who condemns "the satanic madness and illusion" of allegorical reading, and refers specifically to Roman Catholic allegories as "thought out and devised, not by the Holy Spirit but by the devil".<sup>115</sup> Possibly picking up on these statements, Calvin develops the sentiment into an actual theory of allegory's satanic origins: "Without doubt, this was the inuention of satha[n] to abase the authoritie of the scriptures, & to take away the true vse fro[m] the reading thereof. which prophanation God hath reuenged with iust iudgeme[n]t, in that he hath suffred the puritie of vnderstanding to bee ouerwhelmed with the bastard & counterfeit gloses."<sup>116</sup> The same notion appears in Beza's 1554 *De haereticis a ciuili magistratu puniendis*, and in the epistle to the 1565 edition of his New Testament, Beza similarly recounts how in the age of the early church fathers "Satan layed [...] in the countrie of *Grecia*' various 'mischiefs', of which 'two [...] especially reigned in those dayes'.<sup>117</sup> One was the tendency to fuse Christian teaching with pagan philosophy, yet "The other mischief was farre worse, for as an vnauoydable disease, it had almost possessed all mens mindes, and it was this, a maruelous desire that men had to misshape the whole Scripture, and turne it into allegories wherein euery man tooke so great pleasure without measure or compasse, that eche man thought he might do what he woulde".<sup>118</sup> The idea also appears in original seventeenth-century English texts, including a particularly elaborate account in Richard Gilpin's 1677 *Dæmonologia sacra*, and is, finally, all but explicitly reiterated in a passage in Milton's own *Of Reformation*.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Luther's Works*, ed. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis, 1957-86), 2: 156, 5: 356.

<sup>116</sup> *A Commentarie of M. J. Caluine vpon the Epistle to the Galathians* (London, 1581), K1v. The idea is reiterated in Calvin's sermons on Galatians and more explicitly in his commentary on Genesis: "the Allegories of *Origen*, and of such like are to be reiected: whiche Sathan by his most pestilent subiltie went about to bring into the Church, that the doctrine of the Scripture might be doubtfull, and voyde of certieintie"; *Sermons... vpon... Galathians*, Dd8v; *Commentarie... vpon... Genesis*, D6r.

<sup>117</sup> *The New Testament*, trans. Tomson, †9r-v. The passage from *De haereticis* is translated in T. Edwards' *The Casting Down of the last and strongest hold of Satan* (London, 1647), Z1v: "For this was the speciall subiltie of Sathan of old, which yet not one almost of the ancient Fathers observed, that when he could not cast the Scripture out of the Church wholly, yet by vaine Allegories, he made the whole Scripture unprofitable and fabulous, so as truely there was not one piece of Scripture left free of being contaminated with these Allegories".

<sup>118</sup> See above, n. 68, for the same idea applied to Platonism in Biddle's *Twelve Argvments* of 1647.

<sup>119</sup> T. Hearne, *A Seasonable Word* (London, 1650), chastizes the departures from the faith he perceives in his times, among other things, the "affectate desire we have (more consulting with Satan, then the Scripture) to turn

If we now return to the portrayal of Satan in *Paradise Regain'd*, parallels should be quite obvious, even beyond the “Real or Allegoric” passage. Indeed, allegory is just one of the various forms of esoteric semiosis – “presages and signs,/ And answers, oracles, portents and dreams” (1.394-5) – which are Satan’s province both by his own account and by Christ’s disparaging response to his claims:

all Oracles

By thee are giv’n, and what confessed more true

Among the Nations? [...]

But what have been thy answers, what but dark

Ambiguous and with double sense deluding (1.430-5)<sup>120</sup>

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plain truths [...] into confused Allegories” – “have you not learned this yet, that tis Satans policy, chiefly this way, either to divert our hearts from, or darken our understandings in the eying any solid eminent truth, lest when the snare is discovered we escape” (A4r-v). According to another, similarly titled pamphlet – J. B., *A Seasonable Word of Advice* (London, 1655) – Satan encourages men “to put allegorical and mystical (as they call them) Interpretations upon propheticall, and Doctrinal Scriptures [...] so they will make of it what they please” (A3v, B3r). As late as 1969, C. Leslie’s anti-Quaker tract *The Snake in the Grass* (London, 1696) claims that it was “the Grand Design of him who first *Inspired* and *Possessed* them [i.e., the Quakers], to Destroy the *only Saving Faith*, in the *Satisfaction* made by Christ for our *Sins*, by turning all this to a meer *Allegory*” (n5v). An extensive account appears in R. Gilpin’s *Dæmonologia sacra* (London, 1677), Gg2r-3v. Satan, Gilpin explains, “befools men into a belief, that the Scriptures do under the *Vail* of their Words and Sentences, contain some *hidden Notions*, that are *of purpose* so disguised, that they may be *locked up* from the generality of Men”. There are various degrees of such satanic hermeneutics, depending on whether they depart wholly or only partly from the plain sense of the biblical text. The latter is the case with what Gilpin specifically terms “*Allegorical reflections* or allusions”, an approach which “supposeth the *Letter* of Scripture to be *true*, (but still as no better than the *first Rudiments* to train up Beginners withal)”. However, “the crafty Adversary at last enticeth” allegorical readers “to *let go of the History*, as if it were nothing but a *Parable*, not really acted, but only fitted to *represent* Notions to us. Allegories were a *Trap* which the Devil had for the *Jews*, and wherein they wonderfully pleased themselves. How much *Origen* abused himself and the Scriptures by this humour is known to many; and how the Devil hath prevailed generally by it upon giddy people in later times, I need not tell you.” Gilpin also takes note of Galatians 4:24 – “The pretence that Satan hath for this dealing is raised from some passages of the *New Testament*, wherein [...] some things are expressly called *Allegories*” – but denies that the passage justifies “any Mans *boldne[ss]* in presuming to do the like to any *other passage* of Scripture”. Responding, in *Of Reformation*, to the claim that the scripture is too difficult to understand without the guidance of the church fathers, Milton concedes that “there be some Books, and especially some places in those Books that remain clouded”, yet “Hence to inferre a generall obscurity over all the text, is a meer suggestion of the Devil to dissuade men from reading it, and casts an aspersion of dishonour both upon the *mercy*, *truth*, and *wisedome* of God” (YP 1: 566). Allegory is not explicitly mentioned but in this context it can be taken for granted that this includes the “obscurity” presumed in such “wrung” allegorical readings as he criticizes in *The Reason of Church-Government*. At this point Milton still occasionally used the term in positive contexts so it is not surprising that he is not yet willing to attribute it unreservedly to the devil. Even so, the passage testifies to his early familiarity with the tradition that he would later exploit, with explicit reference to allegory, in *Paradise Regain'd*. Cf. Fulke’s *Confytation* on 2 Pet. 3:16: “the hardness of the Scriptures, is not the cause of so many heresies, but the malice of Satan, that stirreth vp such proud and contentious instruments”.

<sup>120</sup> Editors have compared Cicero and several patristic sources, but the parallels in Milton’s own writings and contemporary English sources are perhaps even more relevant: see *De doctrina*, cited below, or Melton’s *Astrologaster*, K1r, denouncing the oracles as “meere witchcrafts and delusions of the Deuill, [...] deceiuing many that came to it, because his answer did still include a double sence”. Milton does use the term *sensus duplex* affirmatively in the already discussed passage from *De doctrina*: “The sense of each scriptural passage is

These are all qualities that could with equal propriety be ascribed to allegory, and in fact we find a remark in *De doctrina* which directly parallels these verses even as it makes an analogy between oracular and scriptural divination: “a principle article of faith [...] ought not to be dug out of ambiguities, or else obscurities – like the Delphic oracle’s answers [*ex ambiguis aut obscuris quasi pythia responsa*]” (OW 8: 75).

However, Satan’s hermeneutic prowess fails him when he attempts to divine the meaning of the events that transpired at Christ’s baptism. As he relates to his “gloomy Consistory” (1.42) – a glaring anti-Catholic allusion, paralleling the infernal “conclave” in *Paradise Lost* (1.795) – he saw “Heav’n above the Clouds/ Unfold her Crystal Dores”, and “thence on his head/ A perfect Dove descended, *what e’re it meant*” (1.81-83, emphasis mine). In other words, the one thing that Satan is unable to interpret is precisely that which is the ground of all valid interpretations – a point repeatedly emphasized by Protestant commentators and further underscored by Christ’s account of the same event later in the poem (1.282), to whom, as to all of the poem’s readers, the meaning of the dove is of course perfectly clear.

The second time Satan refers to the baptism, his language is even more symptomatic. Here he tells Christ that he had kept an eye on him ever since his infancy, but especially since he heard the voice from heaven proclaiming him the son of God:

Thenceforth I thought thee worth my nearer view

And narrower Scrutiny, that I might learn

In what degree or meaning thou art call’d

The Son of God, *which bears no single sence* (4.514-17, emphasis mine)<sup>121</sup>

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single [*sensus... unicus*]; in the Old Testament, though, it is often a compound of the historical and typological [*compositus ex historia et typo*], for example in these words of Hosea, ch. 11:1, together with Matt. 2. 15: *out of Egypt I called my son*, where a double sense [*sensus duplex*] can be established, concerning both the people of Israel and Christ as a child” (OW 8: 389). Thus, within a single sentence, Milton manages to claim that certain passages in the Old Testament have a *sensus unicus*, a *sensus compositus*, and a *sensus duplex*, offering another example of the vacillations to which Protestant literalism inevitably inclined (in this he differs from his source in Wolleb, who speaks consistently of a *sensus compositus*). Given the context, however, *sensus duplex* must here mean the same thing as *sensus compositus*: one sense composed of two aspects, rather than two separate senses.

<sup>121</sup> The same detail is underscored by Herman, who does not discuss “Real or Allegoric”, but does note that “It is Satan who tries to glean complex resonances from language, [...] to tease out its various levels of meaning”; see P. C. Herman, *Destabilizing Milton* (Basingstoke, 2005), 157. See also N. Reisner, *Milton and the Ineffable* (Oxford, 2009), 236-48.



Again Satan is unable to comprehend a central tenet of the Christian faith, and again the terminology is technical and topical, with satirical and indeed comic effect, as the “single sence” of scripture is precisely the central premise of Protestant hermeneutics: “Not only *sola scriptura*, [...] but alongside it an equally significant principle, *solus sensus litteralis*.”<sup>122</sup> Satan had already failed in his attempt to lead Christ away from the principle of *sola scriptura* – “All knowledge is not couch’t in *Moses* law/ The *Pentateuch* or what the prophets wrote (4.225-6) – and now he is attempting to lead him away from that of *solus sensus litteralis*. It does not seem coincidental that these are precisely the two greatest “mischiefs” that Beza attributed to Satan’s influence on early Christian thought.

The conflict these passages imply is not, however, one between literal and figurative reading but between two incompatible approaches to the latter – the either/or of allegory, represented by Satan, and the both/and of typology, represented by Christ. Indeed, we hear of Christ’s invention of typological reading from his own mouth: having learned from his mother of the miraculous circumstances of his conception and the events and omens that transpired at his birth,

strait I again resolv’d

The Law and Prophets, searching what was writ

Concerning the Messiah, to our Scribes

Known partly, and soon found of whom they spake

I am (1.259-63)<sup>123</sup>

Yet like most heavenly things, this too has its infernal counterpart. Christ is not the only creative reader of scripture in *Paradise Regain’d*. Indeed, in discussing the “Real or Allegoric” passage it is easy to overlook one simple fact, namely that prior to Satan saying these words Christian allegory is not yet in existence. Whatever Milton may have otherwise thought of it, the apostle’s use of *allegoroumena* in the Epistle to the Galatians is here irrelevant, for the Epistle to the Galatians has not yet been written. There are no apostles, no

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<sup>122</sup> Cummings, “Protestant Allegory”, 177.

<sup>123</sup> The ekphrasis of the temple reliefs in Vida’s *Christiad* seems a likely source here: Christ is the first to comprehend the typological significance of the “arcane notations and obscure signs, which to that day had never been deciphered by any man, not even by the priests”; G. Vida, *Christiad* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009), 1.551-725.

epistles, no canon of specifically Christian writings, no specifically Christian hermeneutics – all of that, except for Christ’s own insights, is yet to come. There is, however, and there had been for many centuries, allegory and allegorical reading, by means of which the pagans had attempted to make sense of their mythology. And now, the devil, with whom this false mythology itself originates, attempts this pagan method on a fundamental tenet of the emergent Christian faith, in another vain attempt to shake Christ’s conviction of the prophecy. This, I think, is what Milton, drawing on an old tradition in Protestant polemics, intends us to see in this passage: a condensed etiological myth, with strong satirical overtones, about the invention of Christian allegoresis. Satan is the first Christian allegorist. With him emerges, at this very moment, the pernicious method of interpretation that, many centuries later, Reformers like himself would set out to combat.

#### LONG CHOOSING

At this juncture, one is tempted to point to some glaringly obvious parallels, such as between Milton’s abandonment of the term *allegory* and his abandonment of early plans for a secular allegorical epic, or between the birth of allegorical interpretation from Satan’s mouth in *Paradise Regain’d* and the birth of allegorical representation from Satan’s head in *Paradise Lost*. However, as the primary aim of this chapter is to not to enter directly into these debates but rather to reconsider and hopefully reconfigure the grounds on which they have and continue to be waged, this and the ensuing sections will continue to focus on the evidence for and against allegorical readings of Milton’s late poetry, notably *Paradise Lost*. In reviewing this evidence, one thing, and one thing only, needs to be agreed upon by all the parties involved, namely that whether or not *Paradise Lost* is an allegorical poem, it is not *obviously* such a poem, as its allegorical readers have tended to claim. The most forceful statement comes from Treip, according to whom “The problem has always been not to demonstrate the presence of allegory but to account for its conspicuousness in Milton’s poem, and to arrive at

an adequate of its relationship to the poem at large”.<sup>124</sup> Two general factors, however, in addition to various specific points of interpretation, militate against this claim: one, the lack of an explicit invitation to an allegorical reading within the poem itself, its editorial apparatus, its immediate literary-historical context, or the surviving evidence of its earliest reception; and two, the empirical record of numerous competent readers who have viewed the poem as either largely or even wholly non-allegorical. To be sure, there is no lack of the kind of material which an allegorist will see as constituting an implicit invitation to an allegorical reading. And yet, Treip herself inadvertently acknowledges the problem when she extends the title of “overt allegory” to only five episodes, comprising some 680 out of the poem’s 10,565 lines.

The problem is precisely that there is too little “overt allegory” unambiguously to establish it as the poem’s dominant representational mode. Thus some sort of evidence must be appealed to, even if the conclusions drawn from it be diametrically opposite – indeed, *because* the conclusions drawn from it have been diametrically opposite. “Once these associations suggest themselves”, wrote Stanley Fish of an interpretation he proposed in *Surprised by Sin*, “the way is open to read the vision allegorically”.<sup>125</sup> But as Fish himself never gets tired of arguing, the associations never *suggest themselves*. It is the reader who perceives or fails to perceive them, it is the reader who then finds or does not find that they open the way to allegorical visions, and without an explicit authorial or editorial warrant to do so, it is the reader who takes responsibility for these choices.<sup>126</sup>

Thus, to take one of the central passages in the debate, it is up to the reader to extrapolate a broader significance for Raphael’s preamble to his account of the war in heaven in Books 5-6, and to adduce, as the poem’s allegorical readers have repeatedly done, the archangel’s stated method of accommodation – “lik’ning spiritual to corporal forms/ As may express them best” (5.573-4) – as evidence that the same method is employed by Milton

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<sup>124</sup> Treip, *Poetics*, 126. Similarly, the poem is “clearly” allegorical, “by any modest estimate”, to Martin (*Ruins*, 11), and Borris (*Allegory*, 183).

<sup>125</sup> Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 299.

<sup>126</sup> Fish in fact goes on to add, in the same paragraph, that it is “the reader, if he has been attentive”, who “brings together within a single framework incidents he has not connected previously, thereby gaining an insight into the sameness of all spiritual experience”.

throughout his poem.<sup>127</sup> However, drawing the opposite conclusion from Raphael's words – that in specifying the accommodated nature of the ensuing metanarrative they establish precisely the unaccommodated nature of the primary narrative in which it is embedded – is not only possible, but in my view the only logical reading of this passage. If Raphael, as the embedded narrator, is accommodating his narrative to human understanding, then he himself is presumably unaccommodated. Otherwise, why would Milton feel the need to insert the preamble here, distinguishing the mode of what is about to be narrated by Raphael, from that which has been narrated, by the epic voice, up to this point? And if Milton's angels are accommodated to human understanding “By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms” (5.573), then what, if anything, do Adam and Eve see before them as Raphael is speaking these very words?<sup>128</sup>

In point of fact, however, Raphael never actually says this. It is not angels as such that require accommodation, but the extraordinary exigencies of angelic warfare.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>127</sup> To say nothing of the “though what if” which closes the preamble: “though what if Earth/ Be but the shadow of Heav'n, and things therein/ Each to other like, more then on earth is thought?” (5.576-7). There is a venerable tradition in *Paradise Lost* criticism of suppressing the complexity of this crucial passage by quoting it in a form which omits these lines, traceable at least to “Philo-Spec.” in the 1730s (see p. 320-1). For more recent examples, see Patrides (“Accommodation”, 59), Fish (*Surprised by Sin*, 201-2), Treip (*Poetics*, 192-3), Borris (*Allegory*, 183), Sugimura (*Substance*, 197).

<sup>128</sup> At least since Johnson, with partial precedents as early as Dennis or perhaps even Dryden, the majority of critics have viewed Milton's angels as allegorical representations of immaterial beings, although the term itself is seldom used; the literature reflecting this view is extensive, and its emergence is discussed below. A reappraisal of this orthodoxy begins after the discovery of *De doctrina*, but apparently it is only with Lewis's *Preface* that it makes a broader impact: among other contributions, see P. L. Carver, “The Angels in *Paradise Lost*”, *RES*, o.s., 16 (1940): 415-31; C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to “Paradise Lost”* (Oxford, 1942), 108-15; R. H. West, *Milton and the Angels* (Athens, Geo., 1955); Fallon, *Philosophers*, 137-67; F. G. Mohamed, *In the Anteroom of Divinity* (Toronto, 2008); Sugimura, *Substance*, 158-95; Raymond, *Angels*. Until recently there seemed to be a loose consensus on the materiality of Milton's angels, but over the past decade or so a reaction appears to have set in: Sugimura argues that Milton attempts to fuse immaterial and material conceptions of angels, but “consistently falls short” (195) of this goal; Raymond finds that the “descriptions of angels meld the figurative and the literal, and Milton's heaven is a place where these two collapse into each other firmly and inexplicably” (270). For a broader context, see the collections *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. P. Marshall and A. Walsham (Cambridge, 2006), and *Conversations with Angels*, ed. J. Raymond (Basingstoke, 2011).

<sup>129</sup> “[H]ow shall I relate”, Raphael asks, “To human sense th' invisible exploits/ Of warring spirits” (5.564-6). It is this specific activity that requires the “lik'ning” of “spiritual to corporal forms”, these being various degrees, rather than kinds, of being. This was correctly glossed already by Lewis, *Preface*, 112: “I am not at all sure that *corporal* here means more than ‘grossly corporal’, ‘having bodies like ours’. The adaptation which Raphael promises may consist not in describing pure spirits as material, but in describing the material, though strictly unimaginable, bodies of angels as if they were fully human.” Other examples would include Raphael's hypervelocity space travel (5.246-77), or Satan's possession of the toad and the serpent (4.799-809, 9.412-13 ff.): in order to perform such actions, angels can “colour, shape or size/ Assume, as likes them best” (6.352-3), including such as exceed human understanding. Milton goes far out of his way to establish his angels as material, both in theory, in the “one first matter” speech, and in practice, describing Raphael's dinner with Adam: “So down they sat/ And to thir viands fell, nor seemingly/ The Angel, nor in mist, the common gloss/ Of theologians,

Raphael does not even say that the *whole* of his account of the war in heaven is accommodated, but only “what surmounts the reach/ Of human sense” (5.571-2). Thus at least some aspects of the war in heaven are in fact humanly intelligible. And then, finally, comes the “thought what if”, leaving it ultimately unresolved whether even this minimal form of accommodation will actually be taking place. Rereading the passage from the top, we can see how its claims in fact progressively diminish, and ultimately all but dissolve in this signal instance of Herman’s “Miltonic ‘or’”.<sup>130</sup> If anything, it could be argued that this discourages an allegorical reading of the war in heaven, to say nothing of the rest of the poem. At the very least, the matter is debatable, and the same goes for the rest of the poem: we can debate whether or not *Paradise Lost* is an allegorical work; what we cannot debate is whether or not it is so “conspicuous[ly]”, “clearly”, “by any modest estimate”.

With this single reservation in mind, let us now look at further evidence of Milton’s attitude towards allegory, especially in relation to *Paradise Lost*, including the use of allegory and personification in Milton’s early writings, his plans for composing an allegorical drama and an allegorical epic, the matter which accompanied *Paradise Lost* in some of its early editions, and the surviving responses of the poem’s early readers. Here again, it will be seen, the problem is often not in interpreting the finer points presented by the evidence but in

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but with keen dispatch/ Of real hunger, and concoctive heate/ To transubstantiate; what redounds, transpires/ Through Spirits with ease” (5.433-9). Furthermore, some of them have proper “theanthropomorphic” shapes. Satan, for example, “casts to change his proper shape” (3.634) in order to deceive Uriel, while Raphael, landing in Paradise, “to his proper shape returns/ A seraph wingd” (5.276-7). Further examples include the council of Pandemonium, where some devils “to smallest forms/ Reduc’d thir shapes immense”, while others remained “in thir own dimensions like themselves” (1.789-93), or Satan “start[ing] up in his own shape” (4.819) when touched by Ithuriel’s spear. Angels possessing such proper shapes can retain them in conversing to unfallen humans, at least in the ontologically elevated domain of Paradise (see above, p. 260), although Raphael must use his wings “to shade/ His lineaments Divine” (5.277-8), because even before their fall Adam and Eve cannot withstand the sight of his fully unveiled form (just as even the “brightest Seraphim” must “with both wings veil thir eyes” [3.381-2] before the throne of God). After the fall, however, having descended on the monist ladder of being, and about to be banished from Paradise, Adam and Eve can no longer withstand to see angels in any measure in their proper forms, and Michael is explicitly said to meet them “Not in his shape celestial, but as Man/ Clad to meet Man” (11.239-40). Why would such subtle gradations and qualifications be required if Milton’s angels were simply allegorical or accommodated representations of immaterial beings?

<sup>130</sup> “High matter thou injoinst me, O prime of men,/ Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate/ To human sense th’ invisible exploits/ Of warring Spirits; how without remorse/ The ruin of so many glorious once/ And perfer while they stood; how last unfould/ The secrets of another world, perhaps/ Not lawful to reveal? yet for thy good/ This is dispenc’t, and what surmounts the reach/ Of human sense, I shall delineate so,/ By lik’ning spiritual to corporal forms,/ As may express them best, though what if Earth/ Be but the shaddow of Heav’n, and things therein/ Each to other like, more then on earth is thought?” (5.563-76). For the notion of the “Miltonic ‘or’”, see Herman, *Destabilizing Milton*, 43-59.

properly assessing its relevance. Like any educated person of his day, Milton was familiar with allegorical poetics, and in his university exercises we even find a statement of the prevalent poetical doctrine of the day, namely that all good poetry is allegorical by definition.<sup>131</sup> However, Milton seems to have discarded the theory already by the *c.* 1638 *Ad patrem*, which contains a sprinkling of conventional humanist allegory – Jove for God, Olympus for Heaven – but notably avoids any appeal to allegorical poetics even though it does rehearse several other stock arguments from the period’s defences of poetry, as do Milton’s other statements of poetic theory.<sup>132</sup>

There are personifications and conventional mythological and pastoral allegory in some of Milton’s early poetry and the *Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634). Some topical reference may also be present: in the note prefaced to *Lycidas* in 1645, Milton says that the 1637 poem “by occasion foretels the ruine of our corrupted Clergy then in their height”, and even though such explicit statements are lacking elsewhere, topical references may plausibly be suspected, as they may in other literature of the period.<sup>133</sup> An appreciative reference to allegorical romance appears in *Il Penseroso* (1631) – “Forests, and enchantments drear,/

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<sup>131</sup> In his Second Prolusion, dating from his Cambridge years of 1625-32, Milton writes that Pythagoras, in devising his notion of the music of the spheres, imitated “either the poets or, what is almost the same thing, the divine oracles, by whom no secret and hidden mystery is exhibited in public, unless clad in some covering or garment [*involutum tegumento & vestitu*]” (*CW* 12: 150-1). Cf. the above discussion of Dalechamp’s tactfully pro-allegorical Cambridge oration (ch. 1, pp. 96-7), which was printed in 1624, within months of Milton’s arrival to the University, and is perhaps illustrative of the view of the subject he would have encountered there. Milton’s Prolusions contain further examples of mythological interpretations which can be plausibly designated as allegorical, although the term itself is avoided. The ancient Greek poets “taught all learning [...], clad in the beautiful vestments of fiction [*fabellarum involucre obvestitas*]” (*CW* 12: 128-9). What the ancients have fabled of Night being born of Earth denotes a simple cosmological truth, namely that the darkness of night results from “the dense and impenetrable earth interposed between the light of the sun and our horizon” (*CW* 12: 130-1). Pythagoras’ notion of the music of the spheres “signif[ies], in his wise way [*sapienter innuere voluit*]” and “secretly introduces in poetic fashion [*Poetico ritu subinduxit*]” his cosmological learning, and the same is signified by Plato’s sirens and “suggested [*adumbravit*]” by Homer’s golden chain (*CW* 12: 150-1; the Yale translation is unreliable at this point, rendering *sapienter innuere voluit* as “suggesting allegorically”, *Poetico ritu subinduxit* as “poetically figures”, *adumbravit* as “used the [...] metaphor” [*YP* 1: 236]).

<sup>132</sup> In additions to publications mentioned elsewhere, on Milton’s poetics, see I. Langdon, *Milton’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (New Haven, 1924); R. K. DasGupta, “Milton’s Theory of Poetry”, diss. University of Oxford, 1957; I. Samuel, “The Development of Milton’s Poetics”, *PMLA* 92 (1977): 231-40. All of these are of value in some respects, if inevitably dated in others, providing two caveats are borne in mind: one, emphasized by Samuel, is that Milton’s various references to the subject “cannot be taken as fragments from a fully articulated or even a single consistent theory” (“Development”, 231); the other is that Milton’s only treatments of the subject after 1660 are a few minor remarks in *The Art of Logic* and the brief discussion of tragedy prefacing *Samson Agonistes*, so that any attempt to relate a reconstruction of Milton’s theoretical views to his late works, and the biblical epics in particular, is additionally problematic.

<sup>133</sup> For an argument that the topical interpretation of *Lycidas* was not, or was not entirely, an afterthought, see N. Forsyth, “‘Lycidas’”, *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009): 684-702.

Where more is meant then meets the ear” (l. 119-20) – and the earliest of Milton’s statements on the subject matter of his projected epic, in *Mansus* (1638) and *Epitaphium Damonis* (1639), propose an Arthurian framework, which, especially given the precedent of Spenser, was likely conceived as allegorical in mode, although this is never explicitly stated.<sup>134</sup>

By early 1642, however, Celtic legend has given way to Anglo-Saxon history, and Milton wonders “what K. or Knight before the conquest might be chosen in whom to lay the pattern of a Christian *Heroe*” (YP 1: 813-14).<sup>135</sup> This agrees with the absence of Arthur and other legendary figures from the lists and drafts in the Trinity MS, dated to the early 1640s, the reference to the infatuation with secular epic and romance as a thing of the past in the mid-1642 *Apology for Smectymnuus*,<sup>136</sup> and ultimately, the well-known excursus in *Paradise Lost* (9.25-44), where Milton states explicitly that after “long choosing” a fitting “Subject for Heroic Song”, he abandoned the “long and tedious havoc” of “fabl’d Knights/ In Battels feign’d” for the “higher Argument” of sacred history. While it seems probable that the earlier, Arthurian design was conceived allegorically, this was not necessarily the case with the

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<sup>134</sup> This argument goes back to remarks in Toland’s “Life of Milton”, prefaced to his 1698 edition of the prose works: Toland thought “it was from *Manso*’s Conversation and their Discourses about *Tasso*, that [Milton] first form’d his design of writing an Epic Poem, tho he was not so soon determin’d about the Subject”, and also notes his plans for an Arthurian epic in the *Epitaphium Damonis*; *A Complete Collection of the Historical, Political, and Miscellaneous Works of John Milton*, ed. J. Toland (Amsterdam [i.e., London?], 1698), 1: a1r-v. Here again Treip’s position is overconfident: “Toland’s identification of *Paradise Lost* with Tasso’s writings and principles concerning the allegorical epic, with the Manso-Milton critical discussions, and most notably, with Tasso’s prose allegory for the *Gerusalemme*, constitutes a formidable claim for the direct poetical and critical descent of Milton’s theories from Tasso” (*Poetics*, 114). Even if this was an adequate representation of Toland’s view, why should we accept it as valid, much less “formidable”? For the relevant passages in Milton’s early poems, see *Mansus*: “if ever I summon back into verse our native kings and Arthur waging wars even beneath the earth; or if I tell of great-souled heroes of a table rendered invincible by the bond of friendship and (if only the breath of inspiration be present) I shatter the Saxon phalanxes in a British war” (80-4); *Epitaphium Damonis*: “I will proclaim Dardanian ships over the Rutupian seas and the ancient realm of Inogen, daughter of Pandrasus, the leaders Brennus and Arvigarus and Belinus the old, and Armorican settlers at last under British law; next Igerne pregnant with Arthur through a fatal deception when the lying countenance and weapons of Gorrlois were assumed – Merlin’s trick. Oh then if life remains in me, you my pipe [...] will rasp out a British theme” (162-71). On the date of *Il Penseroso*, see OW 3: xxix.

<sup>135</sup> Treip (*Poetics*, 145), and Borris (*Allegory*, 185), have argued that “pattern” here means “allegory”, a possibility that cannot be wholly excluded and is strengthened by the ensuing mention of Tasso. More likely, however, “pattern” here simply means “example”, as in the *Apology for Smectymnuus* later in the same year: the poet “ought him selfe to bee a true Poem, that is, a composition, and patterne of the best and honourablest things” (YP 1: 890).

<sup>136</sup> “Next, [...] that I may tell ye whither my younger feet wander’d; I betook me among those lofty Fables and Romances”; this is contrasted to a later period, when “from the Lauerat fraternity of Poets, riper years, and the ceaseless round of study and reading led me to the shady spaces of philosophy” (YP 1: 890-1).

historical figures he was considering in the 1640s, and even less so with the poems Milton eventually ended up writing.<sup>137</sup>

Other related evidence is similarly inconclusive. In the 1644 *Of Education*, Milton praises “that sublime art which in *Aristotles poeticks*, in *Horace*, and the *Italian* commentaries of *Castelvetro*, *Tasso*, *Mazzoni*, and others, teaches what the laws are of a true *Epic* poem, what of a *Dramatic*, what of a *Lyric*, what decorum is, which is the grand master peece to observe” (*YP* 2: 404-5). While it is true that two of the said theorists, Tasso and Mazzoni, are in favour of epic allegory, it is equally true that the perceived views of Horace and Aristotle on this matter varied, and that Castelvetro explicitly and categorically dismisses poetic allegory in any form.<sup>138</sup> Milton’s allegorical readers have also pointed to his appreciative

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<sup>137</sup> A further problem presented by the attempts to bring *Paradise Lost* in line with the tradition of the secular allegorical epic is their failure to address the rival tradition of the divine epic poem, including such major works as Vida’s *Christiad* or Du Bartas’ *Divine Weeks and Days*, whose influence on Milton is amply attested, as well as a host of other, less familiar examples. Unlike the secular tradition, however, the tradition of the divine epic poem is not as essentially tied, and is sometimes openly hostile, to allegory, as for example in the following stanza from Du Bartas: “Nor thinke that *Moses* paints fantastike-wise/ A mistike tale of fained *Paradice*:/ (’Twas a true Garden, happy plenties horne,/ And seat of graces) least thou make (forlorne)/ An Ideall *Adams* food fantastickall,/ His sinne suppos’d, his paine Poeticall:/ Such allegories serue for shelter fit/ To curious Idiots of erronious wit,/ And chiefly then when reading *Histories*,/ Seeking the spirit, they doe the body leese”; *Bartas: His Deuine Weekes and workes* (London, 1605), T7r. As Madsen argued long ago, the recourse to the typological resonances of many biblical figures enabled Milton, as well as other writers working with biblical material, “to forgo the allegorical ‘veils’ and literal ‘shells’ that enclose spiritual ‘nutmeats’ of Renaissance theory without losing any of the deeper and higher resonances he desired” (*Types*, 17).

<sup>138</sup> Critics adducing this passage as evidence of Milton’s acceptance of the poetics of the allegorical epic also invariably fail to cite it in its entirety, omitting the preceding sentences, where Milton explains how to the teaching of logic and rhetoric “Poetry would be made subsequent, or indeed rather precedent, as being lesse subtle and fine, but more simple, sensuous and passionate. I mean not here the prosody of a verse, which they could not but have hit on before among the rudiments of grammar; but that sublime art”, etc. Whatever shades of meaning we ascribe to “simple, sensuous and passionate” – on which see B. Rajan, “‘Simple, Sensuous, and Passionate’”, *RES*, o.s., 21 (1945): 289-301 – these are emphatically not the working terms of allegorical poetics, and the fact that the mention of the Italian critics follows directly upon this statement is significant. A number of critics have posited or implied Milton’s extensive familiarity with the Italian critics: prior to Treip and Borris, see Langton (*Theory*, 148-50), who quotes E. Phillips’ passage on epic allegory (see below, p. 309) as evidence of his familiarity with the pseudo-Aristotelian defense of allegory under the aegis of the “impossible credible” such sources as Mazzoni’s *Difesa* of Dante, and who hesitates in ascribing Phillips’ views to Milton, but still claims that the passage “contains at least a reminiscence of the Italian commentaries read by Phillips under his uncle’s supervision, and in the pupil’s thought there may well be an emphasis originally derived from his teacher”. Langton’s source, but not her caution, is appropriated by J. T. Steadman, “Allegory and Verisimilitude in *Paradise Lost*”, *PMLA* 78 (1963): 36-9, who posits confidently that “Milton’s theory of the epic had been based, in large part, on the critical thought of the Italian Renaissance”, and then uses Mazzoni’s “impossible credible” to vindicate the propriety of Milton’s allegory of Sin and Death. See also Milton’s comment in *Church-Government* on “whether the rules of *Aristotle* herein are strictly to be kept, or nature to be follow’d, which in them that know art, and use judgment is no transgression, but an enriching of art” (*YP* 1: 813), and the *YP* note to this passage, according to which it “demonstrates Milton’s keen interest in Renaissance Italian criticism of the epic”. Such statements seem exaggerated. Clearly there was an interest, and it is reasonable to assume that it would have been intensified during and after Milton’s stay in Italy, but that it was a particularly keen interest, that Milton read these authors with the minute care evidenced by supposed “explicit and striking” (Treip, *Poetics*, 145) echoes in his writings, that their precepts “strongly influenced” his (late) work, and that he



reference to “our sage and serious Poet *Spencer*” in the 1644 *Areopagitica* (YP 2: 516), including the specific commendation of his “describing true temperance under the person of *Guion*”, and Dryden’s often cited report, that “*Milton* has acknowledg’d to me, that *Spencer* was his Original”.<sup>139</sup> However, appreciative comments about the practice of an older allegorical poet do not automatically entail an acceptance of the same practice, and even if Milton’s original designs were Spenserian, there can be no doubt that even if *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regain’d* are in some way allegorical, it is a mode of allegory very different from that of the *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>140</sup>

The list of putative evidence of Milton’s allegorism goes on, even though it is often unclear what precisely it is supposed to prove.<sup>141</sup> As we can debate the fine points of Milton’s

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taught them to his pupils – for this I find no persuasive evidence in Milton’s rare and very general comments on the subject. Indeed, the incongruous combination, as far as the question of epic allegory is concerned, of Tasso and Mazzoni on the one hand, and Castelvetro on the other, makes one wonder how closely he read some of these authors, and whether this is much more than mere name-dropping. At any rate, the point is moot in the case of Milton’s late work, for his interest in the Italian critics is yet another thing we cease to hear of after 1645.

<sup>139</sup> Dryden, *Works*, 7: 25.

<sup>140</sup> It is unlikely that this is what Milton meant by referring to Spenser as his “Original”. It often goes unnoted that Dryden’s report of Milton’s statement occurs in a passage specifically discussing versification and tracing the “Lineal Descents and Clans, as well as other Families”, in the mastery of English verse. Also, as used in this place by Dryden, the term “Original” is clearly meant in the faux-Pythagorean sense relating to the topos of contemporary poets embodying the souls of their presumed “Originals”, and the sentence reporting Milton’s claim is preceded by one claiming that “*Spencer* more than once insinuates, that the Soul of *Chaucer* was transfus’d into his Body; and that he was begotten by him Two hundred years after his Decease”. Thus Milton’s comment – presuming, of course, that it is genuine, that Dryden reports it accurately, and that Aubrey accurately reports Dryden’s report – may well refer to matters of prosody or versification. Alternatively, the point of comparison might be Spenser’s shorter poems, with which Milton’s lyric poetry was compared within his lifetime, namely by H. Moseley in his prefatory note to the 1645 *Poems*, said to be “*as true a Birth, as the Muses have brought forth since our famous Spencer wrote, whose Poems in these English ones are as rarely imitated, as sweetly excell’d*” (OW 3: 1).

<sup>141</sup> Borris cites the Sixth Prolusion as evidence of Milton’s acceptance of Homeric allegoresis (*Allegory*, 13, 32), but this is only one possible interpretation of Milton’s words: “First of all Homer appears, that rising sun and morning star of more refined literature, with whom all learning like a twin was born” (CW 12: 219). Perpetuating a misconception that apparently goes back to Bush, Treip and Borris both find evidence of Milton’s interest in allegory in the fact that he bought a copy of Heraclitus’ *Homeric Problems* – neither points out that he did so in 1637 – and “extensively annotated this text in Greek”; see D. Bush, “Notes on Milton’s Classical Mythology”, *SP* 28 (1931): 259-72, p. 259; Treip, *Poetics*, 318, n. 17; Borris, *Allegory*, 20. However, the mirage of the young poet delving deep into the mysteries of ancient Homeric allegoresis is quickly dispersed by the actual number and nature of these marginalia. They are hardly extensive: according to Fletcher’s account, there is a single, non-verbal mark in the whole of Gesner’s Latin translation, another in the translation of Dio Chrysostom’s discourse on Homer which follows it, then some annotation on 32 of the 82 pages of the Greek text, and none in the remainder of the book; see H. Fletcher, “Milton’s Copy of Gesner’s *Heraclides*, 1544”, *JEGP* 47 (1948): 182-7. All but two instances are non-verbal markings, mostly vertical lines entered against particular passages in the Greek text. The two verbal comments – each a single word, “Alcaeus” and “Archiloch[us]”, identifying the authors of the passages discussed in the text – are reproduced in facsimile in M. Kelley and S. D. Atkins, “Milton and the Harvard Pindar”, *Studies in Bibliography* 17 (1964): 77-82. A more detailed examination could perhaps discern some thematic rather than merely linguistic interest. From what can be gathered from existing discussions, however, the latter would seem to be the case: Fletcher describes them as “typical of the minor emendations and notes that Milton made in his Greek texts”, and more recently Poole notes

five relevant usages of the term *allegory* in prose works dating up to 1645, so we can debate the fine points of the above-quoted statements, which also cease at that exact same time. Yet whatever Milton wrote or contemplated writing in the 1630s and the 1640s, the fact is that he eventually composed a very different poem: a poem whose subject is derived neither from (secular) history nor legend, and which employed far fewer and far different personifications than those appearing in the Trinity MS drafts for “Paradise Lost” and “Adam Unparadiz’d” – and even there they were already being winnowed with each successive draft.<sup>142</sup> In short, everything points to the conclusion already reached by Allen, Teskey, or Fallon, among others, namely that Milton eventually discarded his earlier plans in favour of an epic poem based on scriptural history, and that this choice also entailed a very different approach to the question of epic allegory.<sup>143</sup> Ultimately, Vida’s trump prevailed over Tasso’s pipe, left hanging on that old pine tree in *Epitaphium Damonis*. Flatly to maintain in the face of all this that “There is no reason to think [...] that Milton ever abandoned either these earlier expressed views regarding epic form and purpose or his original interest in the Italian critics and poets” is to beg the question.<sup>144</sup>

### MISDOUBTING HIS INTENT

If no unambiguous evidence is to be found in the poem itself, in Milton’s other works, or the general intellectual and literary context of the day, what about the responses of its earliest readers?<sup>145</sup> The first thing to take note of here is the absence of an explicit statement of

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that “most of [Milton’s] surviving marginalia” are “solely philological”; Fletcher, “Copy”, 186; W. Poole, ““The Armes of Studious Retirement”?”, in *Young Milton*, ed. E. Jones (Oxford, 2013), 27. Borris also reiterates the discarded view that Milton read Homer in Jean de Sponde’s edition, which contained an allegorical commentary; see Borris, *Allegory*, 20; J. B. Dillon and G. Teskey, “Milton’s Homer”, *PMLA* 101 (1986): 857-8. The attribution to Milton of the marginalia found in a copy of Harington’s *Ariosto* has also been discarded; see R. Flannagan, “Reflections on Milton and *Ariosto*”, *Early Modern Literary Studies* 2.3 (1996): 4.1-16, esp. notes 1-5.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Fallon, *Philosophers*, 181-2.

<sup>143</sup> See Allen, *Mysteriously Meant*, 289-301; Teskey, *Delirious Milton*, 129-47; Fallon, *Philosophers*, 180-3.

<sup>144</sup> Treip, *Poetics*, 139-40.

<sup>145</sup> In addition to the studies cited below, on the poem’s early reception see J. T. Shawcross, *Milton: A Bibliography* (Iter and the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006); *Milton: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J. T. Shawcross (London, 1970-72); “*Paradise Lost*”, 1668-1968: *Three Centuries of Commentary*, ed. E. Miner with W. Moeck and S. Jablonski (Lewisburg, 2004); Leonard, *Labourers*. The early

allegorical intention such as typically accompanied allegorical epics of the period. Some moderns, notably Tasso and Spenser, wrote such statements themselves, but more often these were editorial, and editions of epic poetry on secular subjects, including the classical works of Homer and Virgil, most often come equipped with more or less elaborate editorial appurtenances – epistles, prefaces, appendices, commentaries, annotations – which explicitly invited allegorical readings.<sup>146</sup> In the light of this tradition, the absence of anything of the sort from both editions of *Paradise Lost* published in Milton's lifetime is highly significant. Indeed, the first three "issues" of the 1667 first edition depart from the conventional presentation of allegorical epic poetry in the most drastic way possible, omitting additional matter of any kind, the first line of the poem following directly after its sparse and unassuming title page.<sup>147</sup>

Furthermore, even when accompanying matter was gradually introduced, it continued to defy the traditional presentation of the allegorical epic in both obvious and less obvious ways. The first additions appeared in the fourth "issue" of the first edition, dated 1668, which

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manuscript comments of J. Hobart (1628-83), J. Beale (1608-83), and A. Hill were first published by, respectively, J. M. Rosenheim, "An Early Appreciation of *Paradise Lost*", *MP* 75 (1978): 280-2; N. von Maltzahn, "Laureate, Republican, Calvinist", *MS* 29 (1992): 181-98; Poole, "Readers". The relevant excerpts from Beale's letters are most handily consulted in, and are here cited from, Poole, "Readers", 81-2.

<sup>146</sup> See Spenser's "Letter of the Authors" and Tasso's "Allegory of the Poem", which was included in the translations of the *Jerusalem Delivered* by Carew (London, [1594]) and Fairfax (London, 1600). For some other English examples, see *The xiii. Bukes of Eneados of the famose Poete Virgill* (London, 1553): preface, B3v-4r, and prologues to some books, e.g. R4v-7r; *The seuen first bookes of the Eneidos of Virgill* (London, 1558): marginal annotations (e.g., A3v, P3v) and afterword, Z2v; *Ten Books of Homers Iliades* (London, 1581): epistle, A3r; *Thee First Fovre Bookes of Virgil his Aeneis* (Leiden, 1582): epistle, A2r-v; Ariosto, *Orlando*, trans. Harington (see ch. 2, pp. 93-4); *Achilles Shield* (London, 1598), the first epistle, A2r-v. Ironically, it is the translations of G. Chapman, a fervent advocate of Homeric and epic allegoresis, that contain no such invitations, but only because this was so important to Chapman that he envisaged a separate work wholly devoted to the subject, which he never finished: see *Seaven Bookes of the Iliades of Homere* (London, 1598), A6v, where he promises "a prettie com[m]entarie" promised for the projected complete edition, and *Homer Prince of Poets... twelve Bookes of his Iliads* (London, [1609?]), A4v, where the second prefatory poem again promises a separate "Poem of the mysteries/ Reuealde in Homer".

<sup>147</sup> On the first edition of *Paradise Lost*, see esp. "*Paradise Lost*", ed. J. T. Shawcross and M. Lieb (Pittsburgh, 2007), and the accompanying volume of *Essays*, ed. Lieb and Shawcross. Shawcross and Lieb identify six "issues" of the first edition – two dated 1667, two 1668, and two 1669 – or more precisely six different title page states, "since the texts do *not* evidence distinct issuing" and thus "the term 'issue' is incorrect for the text and applies only to the title page accompanying whatever text was assembled" ("*Paradise Lost*", 392-3). Alternatively, see S. B. Dobranski, "Simmons's Shell Game", in *Essays*, ed. Lieb and Shawcross, who treats the two title pages dated 1667 as variants, and thus posits five issues. On the variant forms of "The Printer to the Reader" and the existence of "anomalous copies" which these demonstrate, see "*Paradise Lost*", ed. Shawcross and Lieb, 440-2. A possible explanation for the shorter version of Simmons' note post-dating the longer one might be that on second thought Simmons saw it more prudent not to draw attention to the fact that the lack of rhyme "stumbled" many readers (as he puts it in the longer version), and thus draw attention to a feature that some potential buyers were bound to consider a flaw.

saw the introduction of a brief note from “The Printer to the Reader” (appearing in a reduced form in the fifth “issue” of 1669, and removed in the sixth), Milton’s prose “Argument”, his note on “The Verse”, and a list of “Errata”. Important alterations and additions followed in the revised second edition of 1674, which saw the redistribution of the text, with minor additions, into twelve books, the partitioning of the consecutive first-edition “Argument” to the beginnings of each of the twelve books, and most significantly, the addition of two prefatory poems, “In Paradisum Amissam Summi Poetae Johannis Miltoni” by Samuel Barrow, and “On Paradise Lost” by Andrew Marvell.<sup>148</sup> Of all these prefatory items, Marvell’s poem has attracted most attention, famously professing apprehension about the poem’s effect on its divine subject matter:

When I beheld the Poet blind, yet bold,  
 In slender Book his vast Design unfold,  
*Messiah* Crown’d, Gods Reconcil’d Decree,  
 Rebelling Angels, the Forbbiden Tree,  
 Heav’n, Hell, Earth, Chaos, All; the Argument  
 Held me a while misdoubting his Intent,  
 That he would ruine (for I saw him strong)  
 The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song (1-8)

Marvell continues in a similar vein for another dozen lines. Would Milton perplex “the things he would explain/ And what was easie he should render vain” (15-16)? And even if he himself was successful, would his achievement be imitated “some less skilful hand”, who “Might hence presume the whole Creations day/ To change in Scenes, and show it in a Play” (18-22)?

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<sup>148</sup> Toland’s identification of “S.B. M.D.” as the physician and lawyer S. Barrow (1625?-1683) is widely accepted; see Milton, *Collection*, ed. Toland, 1: d6v; N. von Maltzahn, “Samuel Barrow”, *MQ* 29 (1995): 25-8; and for a dissenting opinion, M. Lieb, “S.B.’s ‘*In Paradisum Amissam*’”, *MQ* 19 (1983): 71-8. Poole’s claim that Barrow’s poem “had already appeared in some of the remaining copies of the first edition” is apparently not documented elsewhere; see W. Poole, “The Early Reception of *Paradise Lost*”, *Literature Compass* 1 (2004): 1-17, p. 3. Marvell’s authorship of “On Paradise Lost”, signed “A. M.”, has never been doubted and the poem was included in the posthumously collected *Miscellaneous Poems* (London, 1681).

Taken out of context, this is a most curious encomium, and it is no wonder that various critics have doubted its sincerity, or at least its propriety and efficacy.<sup>149</sup> Occasional verse of this sort might be expected to gloss over any misgivings and imperfections, and Marvell does eventually get to the obligatory praise, but not before spending the first half of his poem in raising charges of the most disturbing kind. To praise *Paradise Lost* by a poem in rhyme, on a page directly preceding Milton's impassioned defence of blank verse – to end this poem by rhyming the word “Rhime” itself, and a biblical allusion with a possible sting in its tail – is perhaps nothing more than “humorous”.<sup>150</sup> To use the occasion for thinly veiled stabs at Dryden – and implicitly Milton himself, if he really did authorize Dryden's adaptation – is perhaps merely indecorous.<sup>151</sup> Yet to intimate, especially given Milton's tarnished reputation, that this poem poses a threat to sacred truths – to portray its author, for however transient a moment, as a vengeful Samson tearing down the very pillars of Christian belief – seems either incredibly thoughtless or else genuinely and intentionally hostile.<sup>152</sup> But then this seems

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<sup>149</sup> See J. A. Wittreich, Jr., “Perplexing the Explanation”, in *Approaches to Marvell*, ed. C. A. Patrides (London: Routledge, 1978), and further references in this article. Wittreich argues the poem is a response to contemporary critics of Milton as well as Marvell himself, notably R. Leigh in his *Transproser Rehears'd* (London, 1673), but although he ends on a conciliatory note, he acknowledges that it is “anxious” and “uneasy”, and “it is a wonder [...] that Milton agreed to having this poem printed with his own” (286). More recently, Miner finds the poem, among other things, “very difficult and very odd”, “persistently grumpy, ill at ease, and critical”, “troubled”, “perplexing”, “disquiet[ing]”, “strange”, “very strange”, “passing strange”, “lumpy sauce” (*Centuries*, ed. Miner, 36-40). His speculation that Marvell's chief concern is Milton's antitrinitarianism, indicated by placing “Messiah Crown'd” at the head of the list of the poem's contents, is unpersuasive. A radical argument is put forth by J. McWilliams, “Marvell and Milton's Literary Friendship Reconsidered”, *SEL* 46 (2006): 155-77: Marvell's poems exacts a “quasi revenge” on a rival poet and former social superior, and thus reflects “not an easy, happy alliance, but rather a relationship that was variously fraught with envy, embarrassment, and the severest political pressure”, as well as “a profound difference between these writers and their sense of literary scale and ambition”.

<sup>150</sup> “Thy Verse created like thy Theme sublime,/ In Number, Weight, and Measure, needs not Rhime” (53-4). See *Centuries*, ed. Miner, 37; Parker, *Milton*, 636.

<sup>151</sup> Milton's permission to Dryden to “tagge his Verses” is reported by Aubrey; see *Lives*, ed. Darbishire, 7. The anecdote, appearing independently in printed form in 1713, has generally been taken as authentic, although the estimates of Milton's esteem for the project have varied. According to the later version, he was not enthusiastic: “Well, Mr Dryden, says Milton, it seems you have a mind to Tagg my Points, and you have my Leave to Tagg 'em, but some of 'em are so Awkward and Old Fashion'd that I think you had as good leave 'em as you found 'em”; *Lives*, ed. Darbishire, 335. On Marvell's references to Dryden, see the commentary in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. N. Smith, rev. ed. (Harlow, 2007).

<sup>152</sup> See “On *Paradise Lost*”, 9-10: “(So *Sampson* groap'd the Temples Posts in spight)/ The World o'rewhelming to revenge his sight.” Von Maltzahn has defended a generally positive view of the poem, but some of his key arguments are unconvincing: see N. von Maltzahn, “Ruining the Sacred Truths?”, *Religion and Writing in England*, ed. R. D. Sell and A. W. Johnson (Farnham, 2009). If Marvell's “delight and horror” (“On *Paradise Lost*”, 35) is an allusion to Lucretius, and if Lucretius is also a source behind the descriptions of angelic sexuality – as first adduced by Hardie and Lewis, respectively – von Maltzahn's extrapolation from this, that Marvell's professed concern about the “sacred Truths” refers primarily to Milton's representation of angelic and prelapsarian sexuality, seems implausible. What concerns Marvell is apparently not any particular point of

inexplicable: even if Marvell had his reasons for writing such a poem, why would Milton and/or his publisher agree to print it? What could they stand to profit from making sure that even a reader without any such misgivings about the poem was exposed to them before even reading a single line? Why would they want to reinforce them in readers already so inclined?

All these questions, however, take on a very different light once the testimony of pre-1674 readers is taken into account, which strongly suggests that as Milton's unorthodox encomiast, Marvell is not, or is not only, giving voice to his own doubts, but responding to those which had already been circulating for several years. It has still not been fully acknowledged how similar the specific points of Marvell's "misdoubting" are to those reported in the two January 1668 letters of John Hobart, which present the earliest direct evidence of the poem's reception. The extraordinary delight Hobart eventually found in "a deliberate & repeated reading" of *Paradise Lost* was increased, as he explains, by his initial apprehension about the poem:

perhaps y<sup>e</sup> horreur w<sup>ch</sup> I conceiv'd at an essay in vers of quiet contrary nature, did much contribute to my better likein[g] of this: Could you think S<sup>r</sup> our wickedness were swel'd to y<sup>t</sup> monstrous bulke, y<sup>t</sup> wee should make poison of y<sup>e</sup> only salve and salvation [of] our soules? But 'tis too true, some persons of quality, but more infa[my?] have put y<sup>e</sup> passion of our blessed Saviour in to Burlesque, & after y<sup>e</sup> way of Hudebras, Inverted y<sup>t</sup> sacred & soleme Tragedy into ridicule: This, though I might, I abhor'd to see, & tremble to think on<sup>153</sup>

Apparently Hobart is referring to some sort of dramatic representation of the passion, which cannot have been genuinely burlesque in intention; rather, any insufficiently dignified representation of sacred history, however pious in intention, would have struck Hobart as a

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theological doctrine, nor, for that matter, though this is closer to the point, Milton "offering argumentation where faith might be more appropriate", as suggested by D. Norbrook, "Milton, Lucy Hutchinson, and the Lucretian Sublime", *Tate Papers* 13 (2010), unpaginated e-text. What is at stake is the very fact of sacred history being represented in mimetic form ("fable and old song") – "ruining by fictionalizing", as Miner puts it; *Centuries*, ed. Miner, 38.

<sup>153</sup> In his transcript, Rosenheim notes that the remaining portion of the word beginning "infa" as illegible; "infamy" seems probable.

travesty of its subject.<sup>154</sup> Hobart's actual reaction anticipates that staged in Marvell's poem of six years later with an almost uncanny precision: the reader fears that the poem would ruin the sacred truth to fable and old song, is particularly concerned about the prospect of dramatic representation, but eventually comes to understand the superior quality of Milton's work and the initial doubt turns to enthusiastic praise.

Further complaints appear in the letters of another early reader of the first edition, John Beale. Beale criticizes not only the poem's politics, objecting to the topical republicanism he perceives in the passage on Nimrod (12.24-82) but also its specifically literary qualities, namely "ye long *blasphemies* of Devils; For w<sup>ch</sup> he hath no Authority, & they beget a bad, and afflict a good spirit".<sup>155</sup> "Blasphemies", he writes elsewhere, in relation to Cowley's *Davideis*, "should be [unutterable], too execrable to be adorn'd w<sup>th</sup> y<sup>e</sup> power of elegant verse", and if Cowley erred in granting the devil a few good lines and leaving him to "horribly [speak] out in looks the rest", how much worse did Milton, who, as Beale still maintained in 1681, "mistakes ye maine of Poesy to put such long & horrible Blasphemies in the Mouth of Satan, as no man y<sup>t</sup> feares God can endure to Read it, or without a poysinous Impression".<sup>156</sup> Little further pre-1674 testimony has been found, but there must have been others who were similarly apprehensive or critical of *Paradise Lost* in the seven years between its first and second edition.<sup>157</sup> When Dryden mentions, in 1677, Milton being "tax'd"

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<sup>154</sup> Von Maltzahn suggests that Hobart's mention of "persons of quality" intimates a court performance of some kind, and ascribes the comments of the Presbyterian Hobart to "that revulsion at court excess which so coloured perception of royal government in 1666-7"; see N. von Maltzahn, "The First Reception of *Paradise Lost*", *RES*, n.s., 47 (1996): 479-99, p. 490.

<sup>155</sup> In a letter of 18 December 1668, Beale notes that "Milton holds to his old Principle Lib 10 verse 918 & 927, 954, 972 &c." (the Nimrod passage), a criticism he reiterates in a letter of 24 December 1670, charging Milton with "great faults in his *Paradyse lost* in his plea for our Original right". Beale's topical reading of the Nimrod passage – later independently suggested in Newton's note to the passage – compares interestingly to Tomkins' suspicion of the monarch-perplexing eclipses at 1.594-9, as reported by Toland, "Life", d5v-6r.

<sup>156</sup> For the passage in Cowley, see A. Cowley, *Davideis*, in *Poems* (London, 1656), 4A4r.

<sup>157</sup> Poole tentatively dates an entry on *Paradise Lost* in one of A. Hill's commonplace books to "presumably [...] the same decades" ("Readers", 76) as the Beale-Evelyn correspondence, so c. 1659-82. Hill's entry is of interest, especially its cryptically condensed ending – "Discours Pride the cause of heresy Milton a Socinian Logic. 132 John 17. 3" – but it cannot date earlier than 1698, as the bulk of it is clearly derived from the Preface to C. Leslie's *History of Sin and Heresie Attempted* (London, 1698), A2r-3r. Poole is further mistaken in his explanation of the words "Milton a Socinian/ Logic. 132 John 17. 3", partly due to erroneously transcribing the biblical reference as "12. 3"; the reference is to p. 132 (sig. G6v) of Milton's *Art of Logic* in its original edition of 1672, containing an openly anti-Trinitarian, hence "Socinian", comment relating to John 17:3, a verse of obvious relevance to the subject. Milton's anti-Trinitarianism is also noted in a marginal comment on lines 5.600-15 in a copy of the first edition of *Paradise Lost* now in Cambridge University Library, classmark

by “our false Critiques, [...] for his choice of a supernatural subject”, he is probably not referring only to the criticism of the divine epic in Boileau’s *Art of Poetry*, which he would go on to translate in 1683, but also to charges by English readers that had been around from before 1674.<sup>158</sup>

Is this the context which explains the peculiar nature of Marvell’s encomium? Is the poem meant as a methodical refutation of such criticism, reaffirming, first, the viability of the enterprise as such, second, the viability of the enterprise as executed by this particular poet, and third, the poet’s impunity from any inferior imitations of his work?<sup>159</sup> In “The Printer to the Reader”, Simmons explicitly acknowledges that the additions to the bare text of the first three issues of the first edition – specifically, the prose “Argument” and “The Verse” – were made in response to readers’ inquiries and requests. This bears relevantly on another detail in

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SSS.32.40, according to which “this acco[...] of X<sup>is</sup> birth [...] seems to bo[...] on prophan[...]e[...] & destroy [...] coeternity”. This comment, first mentioned by Raymond (*Angels*, 201), derives from, and thus post-dates, the comment on the “Socinian” theology behind a different passages in the poem in J. Dennis’ *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (London, 1704), D2r-v. See further in my note on “Early Comments on Milton’s Anti-Trinitarianism”, *MQ* 49 (2015): 44-50. Another supposed pre-1674 allusion can also be removed from the corpus, namely the “appropriation” from *Paradise Lost* noted by Shawcross (*Bibliography*, 1672.2), as occurring on p. 8 (sig. A2r) of J. Phillips’ pamphlet *Montelions predictions* (London, 1672). This is probably a simple error: what Shawcross presumably had in mind is not an echo of *Paradise Lost* but Parker’s conjecture that Milton is the “*Civil Grave old Gentleman*” referred to in this place; see Parker, *Milton*, 1147, n. 59, and 1169, n. 95; J. T. Shawcross, *The Arms of the Family* (Lexington, 2004), 98. However, an attentive reading of the passage, especially in the light of its source, conclusively rules out the possibility. This source is apparently the second of T. Brown’s invectives against Dryden, which not only contains a sarcastic reference to the pope as “a Grave Old Gentleman”, but also, in immediate proximity, a mention of “*Donna Olympia*”; see [Thomas Brown], *The Late Converts Exposed* (London, 1690), A2r. Cf. Phillips’ reference to the pope’s “Delights in the Caresses of an *Olympia*” in the same passage which mentions the “*Civil Grave old Gentleman*”; “*Donna Olympia*” is the infamous, in Protestant sources, Olimpia Maidalchini (1591-1675); for a recent biography in English, see E. Herman, *Mistress of the Vatican* (New York, 2008).

<sup>158</sup> Dryden’s comment comes from the “Apology” prefaced to *The State of Innocence*: see *The Works of John Dryden*, gen. ed. E. N. Hooker et al. (Berkeley, 1956-2000), 12: 97. The edition was advertised in the *London Gazette* for 8-12 February, and the “Apology” was apparently written shortly before publication; see J. A. Winn, *John Dryden and His World* (New Haven, 1987), 587, n. 22; Dryden, *Works*, 12: 325. For Boileau’s criticism of divine subject matter in heroic poetry, see Dryden, *Works*, 143: “In vain have our mistaken Authors try’d/ These ancient Ornaments to lay aside,/ Thinking our God, and Prophets that he sent,/ Might Act like those the Poets did invent,/ To fright poor Readers in each Line with Hell,/ And talk of *Satan*, *Astharoth*, and *Bel*:/ The Mysteries which Christians must believe,/ Disdain such shifting Pageants to receive:/ The Gospel offers nothing to our thoughts/ But penitence, or punishment for faults:/ And mingling falshoods with those Mysteries,/ Would make our Sacred Truths appear like Lyes.” Whether Boileau knew *Paradise Lost* is unclear; see Shawcross, *Bibliography*, 1683.2, positing an allusion to Milton’s poem in the verses mentioning Hell, “*Astaroth*, *Belzebuth* [sic], *Lucifer*” (or “*Satan*, *Astaroth*, and *Bel*” in Dryden’s translation). What seems clear, however, is that Dryden’s “Sacred Truths” for Boileau’s “veritez” is an echo of Marvell’s “On *Paradise Lost*” – a poem he must have known very well indeed – and that *Paradise Lost* certainly crossed his mind when he was translating this passage; see N. Boileau, *Œuvres diverses* (Paris, 1674), Q3r-v.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. Miner’s observation that in the first half of the poem Marvell writes as if “he purports to recount, reaction by reaction, his first experience of the poem” and only then moves on to the “now of the 1674 edition” (*Centuries*, 38).



Marvell's poem: "the Argument", he writes, "Held me a while misdoubting his Intent". Miltonists seem to have invariably supposed that "the Argument" here means the general subject matter of Milton's poem – as in "this great Argument" (1.24) and "higher Argument" (9.42) – but on closer look it seems clear that Marvell also has in mind Milton's prose "Argument", singular, for all ten books consecutively, as it originally appeared in the late "issues" of the first edition (Figure 8).<sup>160</sup> If read in this form, it is easy to see how the familiar "arguments" – as they have been indiscriminately referred to since their redistribution in the 1674 edition, even in relation to the 1667 edition<sup>161</sup> – might give rise to precisely the sort of scepticism that Marvell voices. How could this slender quarto volume – how could any

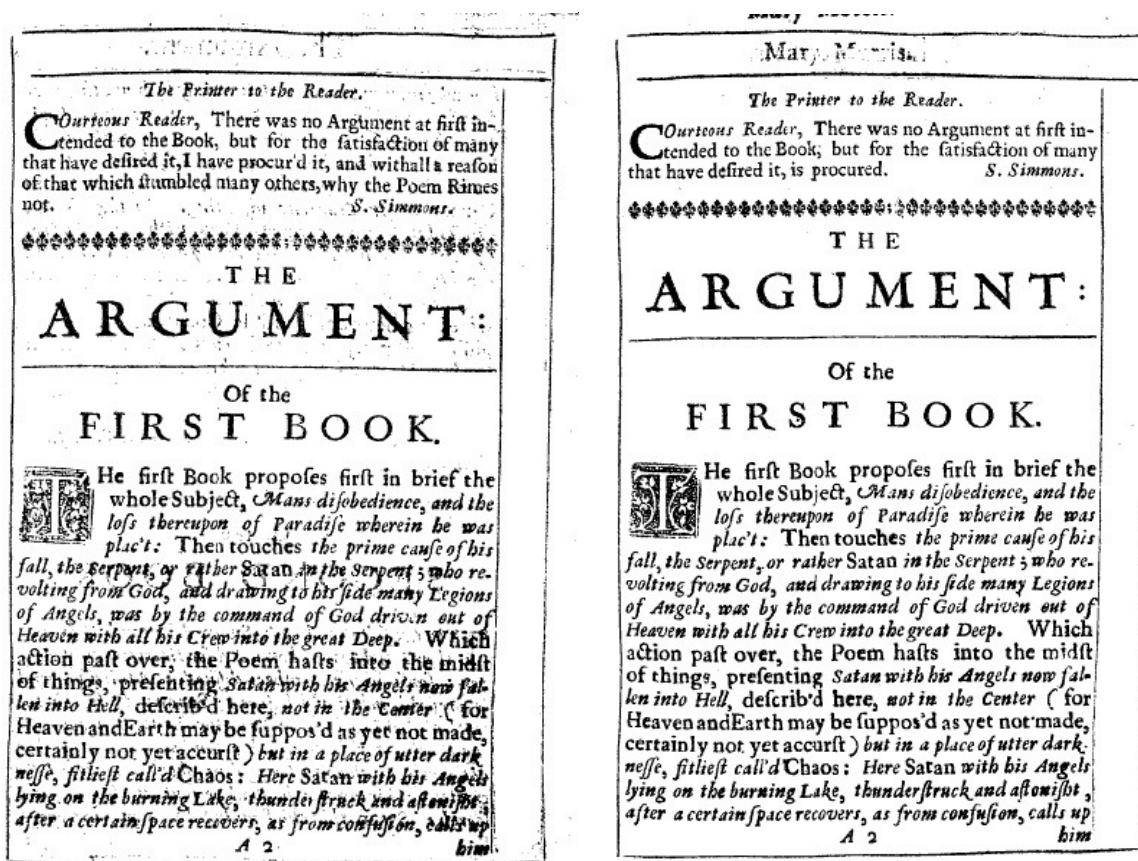


Figure 8. Sig. A2r in the fourth (1668) and fifth (1669) "issue" of the first edition, featuring the long and short version of Simmons' note and the beginning of the consecutive prose "Argument".

<sup>160</sup> As tentatively suggested in N. Smith's note to this line in Marvell, *Poems*, ed. Smith.

<sup>161</sup> Including the edition of Shawcross and Lieb, which accurately prints the text of the added material as "The Argument" and "Argument" (421-1, 442, 444-6), but in the editorial commentary repeatedly refers to "The Arguments" (393), "the arguments" (419) or "the Arguments" (437, 442).

volume, by any mortal hand – hope to do justice to its subject if that subject is, in short, “All”?

Was Marvell’s poem meant to counteract such criticism? Was this also the reason, or one of the reasons, for the redistribution of “The Argument” in the second edition?<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, was this also the case with the seemingly straightforward panegyric by Samuel Barrow? Barrow’s poem divides into three segments: lines 1-16 praise the comprehensiveness of Milton’s project, lines 17-38 praise a specific episode, namely the war in heaven, and lines 39-42 conclude the poem by the conventionally hyperbolic assertion of Milton’s superiority over all other writers, ancient and modern. Besides the fact that the first segment directly parallels Marvell’s emphasis on the poem’s comprehensiveness – “You who read *Paradise Lost*, [...] what do you read but the story of all things. That book contains all things and the origin of all things, and their destinies and final ends” (1-4) – the most notable thing about Barrow’s encomium is its focus on the war in heaven, a fact significant for the present study as this was another element known to have displeased some early readers. Charles Leslie (1650-1722) was neither the first nor the last to criticise Milton specifically for having “Dress’d *Angels* in *Armor*, and put *Swords* and *Guns* into their Hands, to form *Romantick Battles* in the *Plains* of *Heaven*, a *Scene* of Licentious *Fancy*; but the *Truth* has been greatly *Hurt* thereby, and Degraded at last, even into a *Play*, which was Design’d to have been *Acted* upon the *Stage*: And tho’ once Happily Prevented, yet has Pass’d the *Press*, and become the Entertainment of *Prophane Raillery*”.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> This would not exclude other, literary reasons, such as suggested by M. Lieb, “Back to the Future”, in *Essays*, ed. Lieb and Shawcross, 6. Cf. also Masson’s conjecture that “Milton took the advantage of the Prose Argument to furnish explanations of the plan of the poem at one or two points where he had already heard that readers had been in difficulty”; C. Masson, *The Life of John Milton* (London, 1859-84), 6: 624, n. 1.

<sup>163</sup> See L. Hutchinson, *Order and Disorder*, ed. D. Norbrook (Oxford, 2001): Hutchinson never names Milton, but she clearly has *Paradise Lost* in mind when she explicitly refuses to give an account of the war in heaven – “But circumstances that we cannot know/ Of their [i.e., the angels’] rebellion and their overthrow/ We will not dare t’invent, nor will we take/ Guesses from the reports themselves did make/ To their old priests, to whom they did devise/ To inspire some truths, wrapped up in many lies;/ Such as their gross poetic fables are,/ Saturn’s extrusion, the bold Giants war,/ [...] But not to name these foolish impious tales,/ Which stifle truth in her pretended veils,/ Let us in its own blazing conduct go/ And look no further than that light doth show” (4.43-60). The lines are also of interest in indicating Hutchinson’s understanding that Milton was trying to reconstruct the war in heaven and other aspects of unrecorded history from its supposed later distortions in pagan mythology and epic. Milton’s influence on *Order and Disorder* (while still attributed to Apsley) is noted by Shawcross, *Bibliography*, 1697.10; J. Wittreich, “Milton’s Transgressive Maneuvers”, in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Dobranski and Rumrich, 250-3; Raymond, *Angels*, esp. 216-18 – Raymond highlights the same passage, noting that

This final statement is intriguing. Leslie's comments echo Marvell's "On Paradise Lost" and the "Play" in question is obviously Dryden's *State of Innocence*, of which there were several editions between 1677 and 1698.<sup>164</sup> Did Leslie know that *The State of Innocence* was in fact censored – if this is, as it seems to be, the meaning of "Happily Prevented"? This would of course explain the central problem in the reception of Dryden's adaptation, namely, that although licensed, presumably with Milton's blessing, on 17 April 1674, *The State of Innocence* appears never to have been performed, and would not be printed until 1677, although it circulated widely in manuscript prior to this date. Various reasons have been adduced for this, most plausibly an intervention by Simmons, whose contract with Milton barred such an adaptation, but previous accounts have perhaps been too quick to judge Simmons' motives as purely financial.<sup>165</sup> The stipulations of the contract could have been easily used as a pretext for suppressing the work on religious and moral grounds.<sup>166</sup> Furthermore, such an intervention would also clarify a puzzling detail in Marvell's poem, namely that, having first expressed his concerns about Milton's "infinite" work being imitated by "some less skilful hand", who "Might hence presume the whole Creations day/ To change in Scenes, and show it in a Play", Marvell goes on to say that he is "now convinc'd [that]

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"Hutchinson's censures suggest a dialogue with Milton's text". Milton is also criticized by S. Morland, *The Urim of Conscience* (London, 1695), B3r-v, for attempting "to squeeze a plausible Description of *LOST PARADISE*, out of St. John's Vision" by means of "Romantick Stories, which is *Ludere cum Sacris*, and much fitter for Poets and Painters" – to Moreland, significantly, *Paradise Lost* is a "Treatise" – "who when they are got to the top of their *Parnassus*, frame to themselves *Idea's* of what *Chimera's* or *Goblins* they please". Three year later, Toland defends Milton's "choice of [...] subject [and] the particulars of his story" in *Paradise Lost* "against those people who brand 'em with heresy and impiety" ("Life", d4v).

<sup>164</sup> There are separate editions of the work with title pages dated 1677, 1678, 1684, 1690, 1692, and 1695, and it also appeared in the *Dramatick Works* of 1695.

<sup>165</sup> See, for example, Parker, *Biography*, 635: "One suspects that Dryden was not permitted to publish his opera until [the] second edition of Milton's poem had been exhausted". The contract, drawn on 27 April 1667, forbade Milton "or any other" to "print or cause to be printed or sell dispose or publish the said Booke or Manuscript or any other Booke or Manuscript of the same teno<sup>r</sup> or subiect w<sup>th</sup>out [Simmons'] consent" (*Records*, ed. French, 3: 430). Dearing speculates that Simmons and Dryden worked in agreement and that "Dryden was willing to wait until Simmons and Milton's family would have their fair profit on the second edition. Dryden had, after all, known Milton since they marched together in the funeral procession of Oliver Cromwell" (Dryden, *Works*, 12: 322-5). Alternative explanations have included that it was never meant to be acted in the first place, that Adam and Eve's nudity was the problem, or that the staging was too costly, but apparently the possibility of censorship has not been considered, although Winn does note "the possibility that someone would accuse Dryden of heretical language or take offense of at the very idea of a religious opera may have been among the reasons" (*World*, 269).

<sup>166</sup> Dryden perhaps even hints at this in his sarcastic reference to "my well-natur'd Censors" in the "Apology" (*Works*, 12: 95), although the specific objection here is of a strictly literary nature.

none will dare/ Within thy Labours to pretend a share” (17-26).<sup>167</sup> If, as is generally accepted, these lines refer to Dryden and his *State of Innocence*, and if Marvell wrote this poem knowing that Dryden’s adaptation had been licensed, presumably with Milton’s blessing, on 17 April, then why is he “now convinc’d” that the project has been aborted? If anything, we might expect to find him lamenting its imminent fruition – unless, that is, actions to ensure that this did not happen had already been undertaken.<sup>168</sup> Further examination of the matter would be out of place here, but if it can be supported by additional evidence, the censorship, in 1674, of Dryden’s adaptation of *Paradise Lost* would greatly add to our understanding of the early reception of both works.

Going back to Barrow’s poem, it has been claimed that its emphasis on the war in heaven “demonstrates the extent to which Milton’s earliest readers were inclined to single out” this episode as “of paramount importance”.<sup>169</sup> Certainly some early readers specifically praise this episode, but it seems just as clear that a part of this importance also lay in its infamy. It does not seem improbable that Barrow’s unreservedly literal praise, stressing precisely such details – angelic armour, weapons and battle vehicles, the throwing of mountains – as most displeased readers like Morland and Leslie, and apparently led to the

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<sup>167</sup> Along with most others, Lewalski’s edition retains the obviously suspect reading of line 25 found in both the 1674 edition of *Paradise Lost* and Marvell’s *Miscellaneous Poems*: “But I am now convinc’d, and none will dare”. I prefer the emendation, proposed already in the interleaved annotated copy of the *Miscellaneous Poems* which is now Bodleian Library MS Eng. poet. d. 49, where “; and” is struck out and replaced with “that”, giving the far superior reading, “But I am now convinc’d that none will dare”; the added and corrected pages from this copy are reproduced in the Appendix to “*Miscellaneous Poems*” 1681 (Menston, 1969). The emendation is accepted in Marvell’s *Complete Poems*, ed. E. S. Donno (Harmondsworth, 1972) – Donno notes that “This reading points up the allusion to Dryden’s having stopped publication of his opera” (301) – and *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. R. Wilcher (London, 1986). A comparison of the two texts shows nothing that would rule out the possibility that the version in the 1681 *Miscellaneous Poems* is not based on the one in the 1674 *Paradise Lost*. On the dubious provenance of the text of the 1681 volume, see A. Marvell, *Pastoral and Lyric Poems 1681*, ed. D. Ormerod and C. Wortham (Nedlands, 2000), xv-xx. Even without the emendation, it is still possible to read the line as referring to the prevention of Dryden’s adaptation, but as Donno points out, the emended lines makes even better sense in this respect.

<sup>168</sup> Note also the “now” in “now convinc’d”: this would make sense if the supposed measures against Dryden’s had only recently been undertaken, namely between 17 April and Marvell’s writing of “On Paradise Lost” later in the month or early May; see von Maltzahn, “Ruining”, 372, n. 19. Cf. Margoliouth’s commentary, according to which “Lines 25-6 suggest that Dryden, after obtaining his license in April, but before the appearance of Marvell’s poem, had decided against the publication or performance of his opera”; Marvell, *Poems and Letters*, ed. Margoliouth, 3rd ed., 1: 336. But why would he decide against it? Evidently Margoliouth believed that Marvell’s lines provided the answer – Dryden no longer “dare[d]” to do it – but obviously that only transfers the question to why he no longer dared to do it. “[N]one will dare” could just as well refer to measures taken against Dryden’s adaptation, possibly under the provisions of Milton’s contract with Simmons, rather than an independent decision on Dryden’s part.

<sup>169</sup> Lieb, “Commentary”, 75.

censoring of Dryden's adaptation, was supposed to reaffirm the merit of Milton's depiction against such objections.<sup>170</sup>

These questions merit further examination, yet what is certainly striking about the prefatory additions to the early editions is that they not only conspicuously fail to issue any invitation to an allegorical reading, but that they fail to do so in spite of the fact that they were at least partly prompted by precisely such criticisms as allegoresis was traditionally invoked to counter. The motive, the means, and the opportunity are all there, and it would have been so easy to silence the critics by instructing them not to take the poem's representations of divine matters literally. It is therefore of exceptional significance that no such instructions are issued, and indeed, that there is no surviving evidence of any kind that *Paradise Lost* was understood as an allegorical poem within Milton's lifetime. Whether they praise or criticize, the poem's earliest readers invariably praise or criticize that which from the allegorical reader's perspective is the literal sense of the poem. The only exceptions are the topical allusions or allegories suspected by Beale and, if Toland is to be believed, Tomkins, but these are clearly directed at isolated motifs and passages rather than the poem as a whole, and such topical interpretations are at any rate very different from those proposed by allegorical readers of later periods.<sup>171</sup>

If anything, we witness some of the earliest readers of *Paradise Lost* grasping for a vocabulary to express their non-allegorical understanding of the poem. Once his initial

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<sup>170</sup> See "In Paradisum Amissam", 17-28: "How great Lucifer rises up in his celestial armor! [...] While they fling the uprooted mountains at each other as missiles and rain down inhuman fire from above, Olympus waits, doubtful as to which side it must yield". Later on we meet with several appreciative comments on the war in heaven: Roscommon praises it in 1685, Addison in 1694, Hopkins imitates it in 1699; see W. Dillon, earl of Roscommon, *An Essay on Translated Verse*, 2nd ed. (London, 1685), D4v-5v; Addison, "Account", Y1r-v; J. Hopkins, *Milton's Paradise Lost Imitated in Rhyme* (London, 1699). The stage instruction which opens Dryden's *State of Innocence* (London, 1677) calls for the final act of the war in heaven to be directly and spectacularly represented on the stage: "from the Heavens, (which are opened) fall the rebellious Angels wheeling in the Air, and seeming transfix'd with Thunderbolts: The bottom of the Stage being opened, receives the Angels, who fall out of sight". Whatever some readers found objectionable in the literary representation of the war in heaven would have been found infinitely more objectionable in a dramatic representation of the same subject.

<sup>171</sup> Other early topical readings also seem to be sporadic, isolated incidents rather than reflecting a more broadly accepted view of the poem. See the anonymous *Vindiciæ Carolinæ* (London, 1692), B2r, where Milton is of the devil's party with knowing it: "Witness his *Paradise lost*; where he makes the Devil, – *Who, though fallen, had not given heaven for lost* [2.13-14], – speak at that rate himself would have done of the Son of this Royal Martyr (upon his Restoration) had he thought it convenient". On W. Lloyd as the possible author, see von Maltzhan, "Laureate", 197, n. 32. Later on, N. Salmon, *The History of Hertfordshire* (London, 1728), 185, finds a "Character of a Cavalier [...] under the Person of" Abdiel. For a survey of modern topical interpretations, see *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler, rev. 2nd ed., 41-5.

“horror” was dispelled, Hobart was enamoured with *Paradise Lost* and bestows lavish praise on it in spite of his political animosity towards the “criminall & obsolete person” of its author. Moreover, Hobart specifically singles out the subject matter, which is said to be

great, & it has this advantage, That ye Theme it treats off, is as much above  
Hyperbolies, or Tropes, as other are usually below them: Some resemblance it has to  
Spencers way, but in ye opinion of ye impartiall learned, not only above all modern  
attempts in verse, but equall to any of ye Antie[nt] Poets, And his blind fate dose [*sic*]  
not barely resemble Homers fate b[ut] his raptures & fancy brings him upon a nearer  
paralele [...].<sup>172</sup>

As Miner notes, Hobart’s report of the opinion of the “impartiall learned” is strikingly similar to what is reported of Denham and Dryden, which stressed Milton’s originality and triumph over both ancient and modern predecessors.<sup>173</sup> This bears significantly on the claims of those who have argued for Milton’s adherence to the allegorical epic tradition: immediately upon its publication, it would seem, *Paradise Lost* was recognized by at least some competent and influential readers as a work which broke away from, rather than followed, this tradition.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Rosenheim, “Appreciation”, 281.

<sup>173</sup> See *Centuries*, ed. Miner, 34. The responses of Denham and Dryden are reported by the Richardsons, *Notes*, g5r-v. On the chronological plausibility of the Denham anecdote, see von Maltzahn, “Reception”, 487-8.

<sup>174</sup> Hobart describes Milton’s subject as “above [...] Tropes”, which could even mean specifically that he did not see *Paradise Lost* as an allegorical poem. This interpretation is made further probable by Hobart’s comparison with Spenser and Homer: while exhibiting “Some resemblance” to the former – presumably in the episodic use of personifications (although see n. 140) – a “nearer paralele” is found in the latter, and not the allegorical and encyclopaedic Homer passed on from Theagenes of Rhegium to Milton’s own Sixth Prologue and beyond, but the blind bard transported by his “raptures & fancy” in the tradition of Homer’s own Demodocus, “whom the Muse loved above all other men, and gave him both good and evil; of his sight she deprived him, but gave him the gift of sweet song”; *Odyssey*, rev. 2nd. ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 8.63-4. Cf. the 1694 defence of *Paradise Lost* by an unidentified “I. I.”: “the Composing such a *compleat Poem* on such, a no less *Obscure* than *weighty* Subject was a *Task* to be perform’d by Mr. *Milton* only, yet ’tis not out of doubt, whether *himself* had ever been able so to Sing of *Unrevealed Heavenly Mysteries*, had he not been altogether depriv’d of his *Outward Sight*, and thereby made capable of such *continued Strenuous, Inward Speculations*: as he who has the use of his *Bodily Eyes*, cannot possibly become possess’d with. *This* however must be Granted, as indubitably true: The *bountiful Powers* above, did more than make him amends for their taking away his Sight, by so *illuminating* his Mind, as to enable him *most compleatly* to sing of *Matchless Beings, Matchless Things*, before *unknown* to, and even *untought* of by the whole Race of Men; thus rewarding him for a *Temporary Loss*, with an *Eternal Fame*, of which *Envy* it self shall not be able ever to deprive this *best of Poems*, or its most *Judicious Author*”; “To Mr. T. S. in Vindication of Mr. *Milton*’s *Paradise lost*”, in C. Gildon *et al.*, *Miscellaneous Letters and Essays*, ed. C. Gildon (London, 1694), D6r-v.

## SPIRIT AND MATTER, DRYDEN TO JOHNSON

There is, then, no evidence that *Paradise Lost* was understood as an allegorical poem within Milton's lifetime. Two inconclusive statements are found in the later 1670s. The first of these appears in the "Apology" prefaced to the belated 1677 edition of Dryden's *State of Innocence*, which is precisely the sort of statement of allegorical intention that is conspicuously lacking from both early editions of Milton's epic. How, Dryden asks, "are Poetical Fictions, how are Hippocentaures and Chymæras, or how are Angels and immaterial Substances to be Imag'd; which some of them are things quite out of nature: others, such whereof we can have no notion?"<sup>175</sup> The answer is "easie" with creatures of myth and legend, as poets have a "liberty, for describing things which really exist not, if they are founded on popular belief". But what about such beings as angels, which are supernatural but which do, according to Christian belief, really exist? In representations of such

Immaterial Substances we are authoriz'd by Scripture in their description: and herein the Text accommodates it self to vulgar apprehension, in giving Angels the likeness of beautiful young men. Thus, after the Pagan Divinity, has *Homer* drawn his Gods with humane Faces: and thus we have notions of things above us, by describing them like other beings more within our knowledge [...].

The contrast with Milton's own view of these matters could not be greater. Yet while the statement presents further valuable evidence of how controversial the subject matter of Milton's epic was to some of its early readers, we can never know whether this is how Dryden read *Paradise Lost*, or whether the "Apology" extends only to his own adaptation.

The same goes for the passage in Edward Phillips's 1675 *Theatrum poetarum*, listing "proper Allegorie" as a requirement in an epic poem.<sup>176</sup> Because of Phillips's familiarity with

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<sup>175</sup> Dryden, *Works*, 12: 94.

<sup>176</sup> See Phillips, *Theatrum*, \*\*5v-6r: "it is not a meer Historical relation, spic't over with a little slight fiction, now and then a personated vertue or vice rising out of the ground, and uttering a speech, which makes a *Heroic Poem* but it must be rather a brief obscure or remote Tradition, but of some remarkable piece of story, in which the *Poet* hath an ample feild to inlarge by feigning of probable circumstances, in which and in proper Allegorie, Invention, the well management whereof is indeed no other then *decorum*, principally consisteth, and wherein

his uncle, and especially his services as one of the amanuenses for *Paradise Lost*, critics have been tempted to take this passage as indicative of Milton's own view of his poem, yet the passage is in no overt way connected to *Paradise Lost*, and conversely, Phillips' praise of *Paradise Lost* elsewhere in his works omits any mention of allegory.<sup>177</sup>

It is not until one full generation after the poem's original edition that we meet with the earliest unambiguous instance of a reader who approaches *Paradise Lost* as an allegorical poem. The reader is John Toland, who, in his life of Milton prefaced to the 1698 edition of the prose works, defines an epic poem as "not a bare History delightfully related in harmonious Numbers, and artfully dispos'd; but it always contains, besides a general representation of Passions and Affections, Virtues and Vices, som peculiar Allegory or Moral".<sup>178</sup> To this he hastens to add that Milton was not "behind any body in the choice and dignity of his Instruction; for to display the different Effects of Liberty and Tyranny, is the chief design of

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there is a kind of truth, even in the midst of Fiction; for what ever is pertinently said by way of *Allegorie* is Morally though not Historically true".

<sup>177</sup> See his *Compendiosa Enumeratio Poetarum*, in J. Buchler *et al.*, *Thesaurus*, 17th ed. (London, 1669), R8r; *Theatrum Poetarum*, Ee9r-10r; and "The Life of Mr. John Milton" prefaced to Milton's *Letters of State* (London, 1694), a8v-9v. The most forceful statement again comes from Treip: "Phillips' remarks [...] are extremely important in that, published so soon after his uncle's major poem and death, they must inevitably bear on *Paradise Lost* and probably embody something of Milton's own conception of his epic" (*Poetics*, 112). But even if we assume that Phillips' passage reflects his understanding of Milton's work, this still does not prove that it reflects Milton's own view of his poem. For one thing, an objective evaluation of Phillips' remark must take into account the highly derivative nature of his *Theatrum*, on which see S. Golding, "The Sources of the *Theatrum Poetarum*", *PMLA* 76 (1961): 48-53. Golding does not discuss the sources of Phillips' "Prefatory Discourse", where the passage on epic allegory appears, and some portions of which are clearly original, yet there is still a strong possibility that the theoretical remarks derive from a contemporary source, quite possibly one post-dating the composition of *Paradise Lost*. There are several parallels between Phillips' remarks and Le Bossu's *Treatise*, but as Treip points out, the licensing date for the *Theatrum*, 14 September 1674, seems to rule out the possibility of influence. A debt to some other late source seems likely, however, and Treip herself describes Phillips' remarks as "Tasso filtered through some later authority", with the "received epic-allegorical theory of the late sixteenth century [...] modulated by a neoclassical emphasis on decorum". Certainly books could travel fast: T. Rymer, for example, not only read but translated and published Rapin's 1674 commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* in the year of its original publication: see R. Rapin, *Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise on Poesie* (London, 1674). The received view of Edward's close involvement with *Paradise Lost*, and consequently the supposed authority of his comments, should also be re-examined. First of all, Phillips' own report does not indicate a particularly close involvement: "for some years as I went from time to time to Visit him", at which occasions he would assist Milton with "a Parcel of Ten, Twenty, or Thirty Verses at a Time, which being Written by whatever hand came next, might possibly want Correction as to the Orthography and Pointing" ("Life", in Milton, *Letters*, a9v). Several qualifications are to be made here, however. First of all, the period during which Edward would have been most familiar with his uncle's work, 1640-46, predates the composition of *Paradise Lost*, and belongs to the period in which Milton was still not averse to the notion of allegory. His contacts with Milton after leaving his household for Oxford, followed by a busy career as tutor, secretary and writer and translator of a number of publications, were by all accounts considerably lesser and the extent of his involvement with the composition of *Paradise Lost* is in fact unclear; see Shawcross, *Arms*, 73-94. His hand appears in the commonplace book, a letter of 1653, and the corrections made to the final manuscript of *Paradise Lost*; it does not appear in *De doctrina*, written in parallel with *Paradise Lost* up to c.1660.

<sup>178</sup> Toland, "Life", e1v.



his *Paradise Lost*. This in the conclusion of his second Book of *Reformation*, publish'd in 41, he tells us was his Intention at that time; and he afterwards made this promise".<sup>179</sup> Two things need to be stressed here. Firstly, what is likely in Phillips' case is certain in Toland's: his view of epic as necessarily allegorical is based on neoclassical theory which postdates the composition of *Paradise Lost* and indeed Milton's lifetime, most likely through Le Bossu's *Treatise* and/or Blackmore's *Prince Arthur*.<sup>180</sup> Secondly, Toland has nothing to say on any of the elements in the poem that allegorical readers of later periods would focus on, and his identification of the work's allegorical meaning seems determined not by a critical engagement with Milton's text so much as his own struggle against various forms of religious and intellectual "tyranny".<sup>181</sup> Thus Toland appears to have been as typical in his neoclassical theory of the allegorical epic as he was atypical in its application to *Paradise Lost*, and his interpretation makes no impact on later commentary on the poem.

It is to the 1695 *Annotations* of Patrick Hume, the first comprehensive commentary on a vernacular work of English imaginative literature, that we need to turn for the first glimmers, but still no more than that, of a more representative allegorical view of the poem, based on a close and methodical engagement with the text.<sup>182</sup> An extensive commentary like Hume's was an ideal occasion for articulating a comprehensive allegorical reading of the poem, so that here too the fact that no such reading can be reconstructed from Hume's notes is of special significance. In fact, already in his very first two notes Hume presents us with a

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<sup>179</sup> Toland goes on to quote the concluding passages of *Of Reformation*, overlooking, deliberately or not, that these still envisage a secular epic on a theme from national history, rather than the sacred subject of *Paradise Lost*: "Then amidst the *Hymns*, and *Halleluiahs* of *Saints* some one may perhaps bee heard offering at high strains in new and lofty *Measures* to sing and celebrate thy divine *Mercies*, and *marvelous Judgements* in this Land throughout all AGES; whereby this great and Warlike Nation instructed and inur'd to the fervent and continuall practice of *Truth* and *Righteousnesse*, and casting farre from her the *rags* of her old *vices* may presse on hard to that *high* and *happy* emulation to be found the *soberest*, *wisest*, and *most Christian People* at that day when thou the Eternall and shortly-expected King shalt open the Clouds to judge the severall Kingdoms of the World, and distributing *Nationall Honours* and *Rewards* to Religious and just *Common-wealths*, shalt put an end to all Earthly *Tyrannies*, proclaiming thy universal and milde *Monarchy* through Heaven and Earth", etc. (YP 1: 616-17).

<sup>180</sup> See Introduction, n. 32. See Toland, "Life", a1v, for his praise of "the celebrated Pen of Sir Richard Blackmore". His definition of the epic poem seems close to the above-quoted passage in Phillips' *Theatrum*.

<sup>181</sup> In the background of Toland's life of Milton are the controversies and persecutions occasioned by his *Christianity Not Mysterious* (London, 1696); for an account, see J. Champion, *John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture* (Manchester, 2003), 69-90.

<sup>182</sup> P. H[ume], *Annotations on Milton's Paradise Lost* (London, 1695). On Hume, see A. Oras, *Milton's Editors and Commentators* (Tartu, 1931); M. Walsh, "Literary Annotation and Biblical Commentary", *MQ* 22 (1988): 109-14.

textbook example of the Protestant position. In relation to the speculations on the species of the Tree of Knowledge he mentions the Song of Songs, which he describes as “wholly Allegorical, and not to be literally understood”. The positive use of the term is, however, restricted to such particularly esoteric texts. Thus Hume also insists that “*Paradise* was not Allegorical or Figurative, (according to *Origen*, *St. Ambrose* and others)”, and gives its precise historical location: Mesopotamia, “35 Degrees from the Equinoxial, and 55 from the Pole”, as “the Learned Sir *Walt. Rawleigh* plainly proves”.<sup>183</sup> Still, this plainly proven Mesopotamian paradise does “Typifie” – but does not, of course, *allegorize* – “the high and happy State of Everlasting Life”, a reading for which Hume immediately adduces biblical support, namely Luke 23:43, “And Jesus said vnto him, Verily, I say vnto thee, to day shalt thou be with me in Paradise”. This corresponds exactly to the standard Protestant approach outlined above, and the remainder of his *Annotations* largely remains within the same parameters.

Of interest are also Hume’s annotations of Milton’s invocation of the Heavenly Muse, where he compares Tasso and finds him wanting: “though he calls to his Assistance the same Heavenly Spirit, yet we shall find him fall short of our Poet, both as to the Sublimity of his Thoughts and Argument, [...] and that he had but too just occasion to ask Pardon [...] for mixing and intangling Truth with vain Fiction”.<sup>184</sup> By contrast, Milton successfully accomplishes a “much harder Task” of observing, “with all due Veneration, and Awful Respect, the great *Decorum* requisite in speaking of the True God; and to offend in nothing against the Revelations he has been pleased to make of himself; and yet to manage all this under the Heats and Heights of Towing Fancy”. The term itself is absent, but clearly it is Tasso’s allegorical mode of representation – mixing truth with fiction – that makes him inferior to the sublime imagination of Milton, which somehow transcends these limitations.

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<sup>183</sup> See W. Raleigh, *The History of the World* (London, 1614), D5r-G3r.

<sup>184</sup> The reference is to the second stanza of Tasso’s poem: “O heauenly muse, [...] Inspire life in my wit, my thoughts vpraise,/ My verse ennoble, and forgiue the thing,/ If fictions light I mixe with truth diuine,/ And fill these lines with others praise then thine”; *Recouerie*, trans. Fairfax, 1.2.

Many of Hume's annotations prove similarly revealing, providing literal expositions of episodes that some of Milton's later critics read as allegorical.<sup>185</sup> Nor is Hume troubled by the personifications.<sup>186</sup> On the critical question of angels, however – critical because of all other potentially allegorical elements only the angels are continually present throughout the poem – we see Hume occasionally vacillating and thus anticipating the concerns of later critics. He clearly understood their seriousness, as witnessed by his remarks on the engraving of Satan prefaced to Book 1 in the illustrated edition.<sup>187</sup> Glossing such key episodes as Raphael's dinner with Adam, Hume is willing to follow Milton almost, but not quite to the utmost reaches of his imagination, with the materialism of which he was clearly not entirely comfortable.<sup>188</sup> With the angels' emphatically physical wings, for example: most of the time Hume speaks of Milton's winged angels as a matter of course, but occasionally he glosses the

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<sup>185</sup> See Hume, *Annotations*, notes to 3.495, 4.998-1004: Satan really enters the serpent, "actuating his Organs", the location of the Paradise of Fools is "rationally assigned", the "golden Scales" are the constellation Libra, etc.

<sup>186</sup> Annotating the Sin and Death episode, he explicates the allegorical meaning and provides scriptural and classical parallels, and his rare critical judgments are those of moderate praise: the allegory is "genuine and exact", "a true Description" of its subject (notes to 1.34, 2.651, 2.781, 4.812). Even Sin and Death's passage through chaos receives a scientific explanation: the "*Asphaltic* slime" (10.298) out of which it is fashioned is a naturally occurring "clammy Substance, a sort of natural Mortar extremely viscous and binding", which is "kneaded and wrought" by Death's mace into "a Consistence, grown cold and dry". The bridge also occasions one of Hume's most original notes, recognizing the anti-Catholic reference in the phrase "by wondrous Art/Pontifical" (10.312-13), and referring to Roman Catholic bishops as "Successors" of Sin and Death, who, "thô they found this Infernal Bridge built to their hand, have made bold to erect a Baiting-place of *Purgatory* by the way, more *Poetical* and Fictitious than it".

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Oras, *Editors*, 45-6. Hume criticizes the artist for failing to respond to Satan's description at 1.589-606: he "should have taken the Noble Lineaments of his Obscured, and yet Glorious, Haughty Looks: He should have express'd his Furrow'd Face and Faded Cheek under those Lofty Brows of stedfast Courage and of wary Pride, vowing and waiting for Revenge: If he had hit these Lucky Stroaks, he might have spared his Horns and Asses Ears, so unsuitable to the Description of the Arch-Angel, that *Milton* has afforded him no hint of 'em". Hume also criticizes the engraving prefacing Book 12, again insisting on the specificity of Milton's description at 12.637-9: "The Angel led our Parents, loath to depart from their beloved Seat, in each hand, which the Designer of the Copper Plate has not well exprest, representing him, *shoving them out*, as we say, *by Head and Shoulders*." For the criticized engravings, see Figure 9.

<sup>188</sup> Contrary to some passages of scripture (Tob. 12:19, Judg. 13:14), as well as some distinguished theologians (Theodoret, Aquinas), "Our Author believes the Angel did with *keen and hungry dispatch* eat, digest, and turn (what was convertible of it) into his proper substance, *evacuating* the rest by *Perspiration*; nor does there seem any absurdity in the Asseveration, since most Texts of Holy Writ, where the Appearances of *Angels* are Recorded, make 'em subject to Human Sight, Hearing and Feeling too, why not then to Eating, as literally affirm'd of 'em, as any of the other Actions falling under Sense? But these Enquiries are too subtle, and exceed the compass of our Capacities." But if there is no absurdity in Milton's depictions, then why this final disclaimer? Typically Hume resorts to such statements when he feels he is getting in over his head. See notes to 1.46, 2.916, 3.342, 7.92, 7.501: "our Narrow Capacities are in no proportion to the Compass of the Creation"; "so obscure to our finite Understandings"; "as well as is possible for Human Understanding to do, in things so much exceeding the compass of our Capacities"; "Such Doubts are unresolvable, as not coming within the compass of Human comprehension"; "too high for Man's capacity to reach".

attribute as indicating a metaphorical or allegorical meaning.<sup>189</sup> He also took exception to the limited knowledge attributed to Abdiel, who finds “Already known what he for news had thought/ To have reported” (6.20-1): “This is said”, Hume comments, “after the manner of Men, for it is unconceivable that an Angel [...] should be a stranger to the *Omniscience of GOD Almighty*.”<sup>190</sup> On the whole, however, Hume’s understanding of the poem is still predominantly literal.

In sum, we fail to find in the first generation of the poem’s readers evidence either of a comprehensively allegorical reading of the poem, or of objections to its major allegorical episodes. The importance of Addison’s *Spectator* papers in the history of *Paradise Lost* criticism is well-acknowledged, but his view of the problem of allegory in the poem is usually oversimplified, most often by focusing only on his criticism of the most notable “allegorical”

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<sup>189</sup> Wings were of course a common angelic attribute. Unconventionally, however, Milton’s descriptions often insist on their physicality, most notably in the contrasting descriptions of Satan and Raphael. Thus Satan rises from the Lake of Fire and “with expanded wings [...] steers his flight/ Aloft, incumbent on the dusky Air/ That felt unusual weight” (1.225-7). We further see him “Fluttring his pennons” as he is tossed about in the more inhospitable domains of Chaos, whereas in the calmer regions “his Sail-broad Vannes/ He spreads for flight” and “Weighs his spread wings” (2.927-1045). This is paralleled by Raphael’s flight, who “Sailes [...] with steddie wing/ Now on the polar windes, then with quick Fann/ Winnows the buxom Air”, and meets Adam and Eve in the form of “A Seraph wingd”, with his three pairs of wings described in specific visual and even olfactory detail – a “Heav’nly fragrance” filled the air when he “shook his Plumes” (5.268-87). Hume accepts winged angels in notes to 2.77, 2.81, 2.132, 2.408, 2.634, etc. However, annotating the description of Gabriel as “winged Warriour” (4.576), he says that this is “according to the usual Description of Angels, adorn’d with Wings, to denote the Swiftnes and Agility of Spiritual Beings”. Elsewhere, he glosses *cherub* as “a Human Shape with two Wings, placed over the Mercy-Seat of the Ark of the Covenant *Exod.* 25. 18 & 19. representing the Invisible Angels”, and in relation to the “winged Haralds” at 1.752 he notes that “Milton has given them Wings, not only as Angels, but to express their speed”. A brief statement in *De doctrina* has been interpreted as stating the same view: angels, it is said, “are of supreme swiftnes, as if endowed with wings [*quasi alis induti*], *Ezek.* 1: 6” (*OW* 8: 120). The passage is taken over from Ames: “And in greatest agility, that as if they had wings [*quasi alati*], they doe swiftly dispatch that which they have in commission. *Ezech.* 1. 6.”; *Medvlla S. S. theologiæ*, 3rd ed. (London, 1629), 1.8.38; *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (London, [1642]). Sumner translated “Endued with the greatest swiftnes, which is figuratively denoted by the attribute of wings” (*Christian Doctrine*, 1: 247). Recently, see Raymond, *Angels*, 306: “*De Doctrina* suggests that the wings of angels indicate their great velocity.” The *quasi* does not, however, categorically exclude the possibility that angels actually have wings, and as we have seen above, Milton could resort to such careful phrasing, or re-use such as he found in his sources, when he wanted to avoid direct conflict with a more orthodox view than the one he espoused. In any case, in *Paradise Lost* the angels’ wings seem overwhelmingly real rather than figurative. Note esp. that Raphael apparently transforms himself into a bird-like shape when travelling to earth, and then, upon arrival, transforms back into a winged angel: once “within soare/ Of Towing Eagles, to all the Fowles he seems/ A *Phænix* [...] At once on th’ Eastern cliff of Paradise/ He lights, and to his proper shape returns/ A Seraph wingd” (5.270-7). This makes no sense if the wings are merely symbolic. Finally, note that the proof text, *Ezek.* 1:6, fails to indicate any figurative meaning, reading simply “And euery one had foure faces, and euery one had foure wings”.

<sup>190</sup> Abdiel’s limited knowledge accords with Milton’s view in *De doctrina*: “The good angels do not see into all things in respect of God, as the Papists imagine, but [see] only, through revelation, those things which God has decided to [reveal], and other things through a certain outstanding process of reasoning; but many things they do not know” (*OW* 8: 140).



Figure 9. The two engravings Hume objects to in his *Annotations*, prefacing Books 1 and 12, respectively. These were first introduced in the fourth edition of 1688, and have been identified as the work of J. B. Medina (Books 3 and 5-11), H. Aldrich (Books 2, 12, and possibly 1), and B. Lens (Book 4), engraved by M. Burghers, with the exception of Book 4, by P. P. Bouche. It is interesting that Hume objects to two of the three illustrations by Aldrich, whose authorship was first identified by S. Boorsch, “The 1688 *Paradise Lost* and Dr. Aldrich”, *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 6 (1972): 133-50; see p. 148-9 on the tentative attribution to Aldrich of the illustration to Book 1. For a recent study, see T. Anderson, “Reading the Illustrations of the 1688 Edition of *Paradise Lost*”, *MQ* 38 (2004): 163-87.

episodes. What is of paramount importance to Addison is the probability of the action in its literal sense: everything else in his view of the epic poem follows from this central premise, including his view of epic allegory. Thus any use of personifications must be defensible by an appeal to commonly held beliefs, or their action must be curtailed to the point where they no longer inhabit the poem’s mimetic universe – they must be dissolved either into actual deities or mere metaphors.<sup>191</sup> Secondly, any allegorical meanings proper (i.e. not personifications)

<sup>191</sup> See J. Addison, *Notes upon the Twelve Books of Paradise Lost* (London, 1719), 128-9: “Homer indeed represents *Sleep* as a Person, and ascribes a short part to him in his *Iliad*; but we must consider that tho’ we now

must not come at the expense of the probability of the literal action by which they are signified.<sup>192</sup> Hence Addison's criticism of modern in favour of classical epic – where personifications are used sparsely, and where even the most fantastic episodes can be justified by the credulity of the author and his original audience – and his overall indifference to epic allegory, no longer the “soul” of the epic poem but an optional extra, which the reader may ignore or entertain at his pleasure.

This is the logic which governs Addison's responses to the marvellous episodes in *Paradise Lost*, where he criticizes the improbable personification-allegories of Sin and Death and the pavilion of Chaos, as well as the Paradise of Fools – which “rather savour of the Spirit of *Spenser* and *Ariosto* than of Homer and Virgil” – but praises other episodes which he deems probable according to Christian belief, including those he considers allegorical, and for which he invariably adduces specific scriptural sources.<sup>193</sup> It is of particular note that in his

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regard such a Person as entirely shadowy and unsubstantial, the Heathens made Statues of him, placed them in their Temples, and looked upon him a Real Deity”; where such belief is not found, personifications must not be “introduced as principal Actors, and engaged in a Series of Adventures”, but restricted to “such short Allegories as are not designed to be taken in the literal Sense, but only to convey particular Circumstances to the Reader after an unusual and entertaining Manner”. Addison's papers first appeared in *The Spectator* between January and May 1712, with some subsequent revisions and additions.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-3: “I know that many Criticks look upon the Stories of *Circe*, *Polypheme*, the *Sirens*, nay the whole *Odyssey* and *Iliad* to be Allegories; but allowing this to be true, they are Fables, which considering the Opinions of Mankind that prevailed in the Age of the Poets, might have been according to the Letter [...]. The story should be such as an ordinary Reader may acquiesce in, whatever natural, moral, or political Truth may be discovered in it by Men of greater Penetration.” Addison's view is thus in sharp contrast to earlier allegorical poetics of the “impossible credible”, and in agreement with the opposite tendency, where limitations on allegory go hand in hand with limitations on the imagination. The only reason why Addison can excuse even the most fantastic episodes in ancient poetry – the transformation of ships in the *Aeneid*, for example, which he himself refers to as the poem's “most violent machine” – is because he presumes that their authors and original audiences found them believable.

<sup>193</sup> For the criticism of the personifications and the Paradise of Fools, “Particulars which do not seem to have Probability enough for an Epic Poem”, see Addison, *Notes*, 11-12, 34, 55-7, 62-3 and esp. 127-30. The measure of probability for non-classical marvels is the perceived authority of scripture: see Addison's positive commentary on the golden scales (4.990-1015), the golden hinges of the gate of heaven (5.253-6, 7.205-7), Michael's sword (6.320-34), the golden compasses (7.224-231), and the golden altar (11.15-20), which he relates to Dan. 5:27, Ezek. 1, 2 Macc. 15:15-16, Isa. 40:12 and Job 26:7, and Rev. 8:3, respectively (70-1, 78-80, 88-9, 97, 131). Some of these are to be understood allegorically, and in several instances the term itself is used: the golden scales are a “noble Allegory”, Michael's sword is an “Allegorical Weapon”, the golden compasses are an instance of “Poetry delight[ing] in cloathing abstracted Ideas in Allegories and sensible Images”. Elsewhere, Satan “starting up in his own form [4.810-19] is wonderfully fine, both in the literal description and in the moral which is concealed under it”; *ibid.*, 68-9. At one point, Addison even anticipates Gallagher's argument, approving of the throwing of mountains in the war in heaven not because it is based on Hesiod, but because it was “the Opinion of many Learned Men that the Fable of the Giants War, which makes so great a Noise in Antiquity, and gave Birth to the sublimest Description in *Hesiod's* Works, was an Allegory founded upon this very Tradition of a Fight between the good and bad Angels” (87). This is to be distinguished from the claim, found already in Hume – see Oras, *Editors*, 30-1 – that classical myths are corruptions of biblical history; in

concluding remarks he refuses to adduce an overarching allegorical meaning for the poem. He does adduce a “Moral”, as “Those who have read *Bossu*, and many of the Criticks who have written since his Time, will not pardon me if I do not find out the particular Moral which is inculcated in *Paradise Lost*”.<sup>194</sup> However, Addison specifically distances himself from Le Bossu’s allegorical concept of an epic poem’s “Moral”: he “can by no means think, with the last-mentioned *French* Author, that an Epic Writer first of all pitches upon a certain Moral, as the Ground-Work and Foundation of his Poem, and afterwards finds out a Story to it”.<sup>195</sup> Thus Addison’s “Moral” means, precisely, a moral, in the modern sense of the word, rather than allegory: some general insight drawn by the reader from his or her engagement with a work of imaginative literature, and not necessarily one intended by the author, rather than an intentional structure of secondary meaning. How little relevance Addison ascribes to the poem’s moral, even in this limited sense, is most clearly seen in the actual moral he adduces for *Paradise Lost*, namely, “that Obedience to the Will of God makes Men happy, and that Disobedience makes them miserable”. Nothing could be more true, of course, nor could anything be more banal or superfluous, and one gets the feeling that he is, at least in part, ridiculing those who still adhered to Le Bossu’s view, in which the entire domain of the aesthetic is of almost no consequence and it “signifies little” whether the same “moral” is expressed through a story about figures of ancient myth or modern history, angels or dogs.<sup>196</sup>

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order to use ancient myth ancient poets to supplement and reconstruct sacred history, Milton must posit that it reflects oral tradition predating the Bible.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>195</sup> See Le Bossu *et al.*, *Treatise*, esp. B8r-C1r. Note also that Addison avoids speaking of *allegory* in discussing the poem’s *moral*, whereas Le Bossu uses the two terms interchangeably. The question of intention was debated by Richard Blackmore and John Dennis in 1716. Blackmore distinguishes between the epic poem’s “allegory” and its “moral”, and follows Addison in rejecting Le Bossu’s view of the latter: unlike with allegory, which is intentional, “If it be well observ’d it will evidently appear, that no Author can form the Narration of any great and memorable Action but some Moral will arise from it, whether the Writer intends it or not [...]. As from Pulpit Discourses on Divine Subjects, many useful Inferences may be deduc’d by the Preacher; so in these superior Poems various Doctrines may arise, which the Poet may himself mention if he pleases, or leave them to be drawn by the People for their Improvement” (*Essays*, 77-8). Dennis writes to Blackmore on 5 December 1716 to express disagreement with this view, and his argument is interesting for its use of Shakespearean examples: “a Poet may form the Narration, of a Hundred great and memorable Actions, and not one Moral shall arise from them all, as the battle of *Pharsalia*, the Death of *Brutus* and *Cassius*, the Death of *Cato*, the Death of King *Lear*, the Death of *Hamlet*, the Death of *Harry* the Fourth: And I defie any Poet to form a general Action, and general Characters, but he must form them upon a Moral, and consequently that Moral must be first in his Head”; see J. Dennis, *Original Letters* (London, 1721), 1: B2v. Presumably Dennis means to say that there *is* a moral in the plays he mentions, but that it is there because of Shakespeare’s design rather than the subject matter itself.

<sup>196</sup> See Le Bossu *et al.*, *Treatise*, C1r.

Addison's position is exactly inverse: it matters little what the poem's moral is, what matters is how it is expressed.

Nor does Addison object to Milton's angels: the "machines" of the epic poem ought to be probable, and in addition, the "machines" of the divine epic poem ought also to be theologically probable, a difficult demand that Milton, however, successfully meets.<sup>197</sup> The war in heaven is presented exactly as we might imagine it to have happened: the cause of the angels' revolt is "founded on hints in Holy Writ, and on the opinion of some great writers", and is thus "the most proper that the poet could have made use of".<sup>198</sup> Generally, a constant refrain in Addison's criticism is his awe at how skilfully Milton has extrapolated epic narrative from even the minest hints in scripture.

Soon, however, a different critical position begins to emerge. In a letter from January 1722, John Dennis raises "an Objection, which no one that I know has made against those very Machines of *Milton*, from the Force and Power of which those sublime Beauties were drawn".<sup>199</sup> The objection is that these machines have "the appearance of something inconsistent and contradictory, for in them the poet seems to confound Body and Mind, Spirit and Matter". Why did Milton make his angels, "in themselves pure Spirits and uncompounded Essences", bear "solid Arms and Armour, which can be employ'd by Body only?" "[A]ll the answer that can reasonably be made" – and one which anticipates the best contemporary modern scholarship on this subject – is that it was "*Milton's* Notion of the thing" that angels "on occasion, either voluntarily assume Bodies, or by superiour Power and divine Command are oblig'd to assume them". Dennis compares the representations of angels in Cowley and Tasso, but notes that they "avoided the giving their Readers the occasion of believing, that there is in their Descriptions of those fall'n Angels any real Contradiction".<sup>200</sup> Dennis'

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<sup>197</sup> See Addison, *Notes*, 80: "Several of the French, Italian, and English poets have given a loose to their imaginations in the description of angels; but I do not remember to have met with any so finely drawn, and so conformable to the notions which are given of them in Scripture, as this [i.e. of Raphael] in Milton".

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>199</sup> *Proposals for Printing by Subscription... Miscellaneous Tracts, Written by Mr. John Dennis* (London, 1721), D1r-2v.

<sup>200</sup> In his "Allegory of the Poem", Tasso himself states that his devils "are both a figure, and a thing figured, and doe here represent the verie same euils, which doe oppose themselues against our ciuill happiness, so that it may not be to vs a ladder of Christian blessednes", while "The *Angels* doe signifie sometime *Heauenly helpe*, and sometime *Inspiration*" (*Recouerie*, A3r). In Canto 1, Gabriel appears "In forme of airie members faire imbarede,/"



statements strike a new note in *Paradise Lost* criticism, at least as far as the surviving record is concerned, and he is conscious of their novelty.

Even a decade later, the educationalist John Clarke thought he discovered in *Paradise Lost* “some fundamental Flaws, [...] which [...] have not, I believe, been taken Notice of by others”, namely that Milton’s representation of angels, who are, “by common supposition, [...] immaterial Beings”, is “not only ridiculous, but profane”, and furthermore, that his depictions of the “unfathomable” deity, “whose Ways are past finding out”, are particularly offensive and blasphemous.<sup>201</sup> The importance of the angels emerges even more clearly in the *Notes* of the Richardsons, for unlike other potentially allegorical episodes, “These Heavenly Beings are so often mentioned in this Poem that it will be proper also to fix the Idea of Them thus Early”.<sup>202</sup> However, although they are similar to Dennis and Clarke in reporting an initial “Confusion in our thoughts” occasioned by Milton’s angels, the Richardsons, in one of their finest notes, negotiate this “Confusion” into the position later reached by Lewis and other modern critics.<sup>203</sup>

By the 1730s, then – roughly two generations now since the first edition of *Paradise Lost* – a number of critics had raised objections to Milton’s angels, while Addison, who found nothing objectionable in the angels, censored his personifications and the Paradise of Fools. In his 1727 *Essay on Epick Poetry*, Voltaire had already become the first critic to combine these

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His spirits pure were subiect to our sight,/ Like to a man in shew and shape he fared,/ But full of heau’nly maiestie and might,/ A stripling seem’d he thrice fiue winters olde,/ And radiant beames adorn’d his locks of golde” (1.13).

<sup>201</sup> See J. Clarke, *An Essay upon Study* (London, 1731), 202-12. Clarke further dismisses the argument that angels are “vulgarly supposed capable of assuming Bodies, which is sufficient to justify the Poet. I humbly conceive it is not. For to take no Notice of the Absurdity of supposing them capable of receiving Pain by the Wounding of such Bodies, they are likewise supposed capable of laying them aside at Pleasure”. What Clarke means by “assuming Bodies” is taking control of material bodies as vehicles for their immaterial essence. This, as he correctly points out, would be a theological conception inadequate for Milton’s representation of the war in heaven, as instead of defending their material vehicles from the attacks of their opponents by means of swords and shields, they could protect themselves simply by “throwing away [their] Body at once”.

<sup>202</sup> *Notes*, n. to 1.45.

<sup>203</sup> “Milton calls them Spirits, but he also speaks of them in such a Manner, and as having such Properties as do not agree with the Notion we have of Spirits in the Strictest and most sublime Sense of that Term. [...] This necessarily occasions a Confusion in our Thoughts when we read, and consequently takes off from the Pleasure the Imagination might have with Reconcilable Ideas, that is, with understanding the Word Spirit in an Inferior, not in its Utmost Signification, as it has been observ’d the Term Creation must be understood. Suppose then we conceive of the Angels as Material Substances, Spirits in an Inferior Sense, Matter the nearest approaching to Spirit, but still Matter, Fire [...]. Thus conceiving of the *Miltonick* Angels gives us a most Delightful Idea, and such a One as the Mind can, as I may say, Deal withal; we can be Familiar with Such Angels, as *Adam* is described to have been, and with almost an Equal Pleasure” (ibid.).

two lines of criticism into a more comprehensive critique of the poem's representational mode, but still does not attempt to appease these perceived faults through allegoresis.<sup>204</sup> In 1738-39, however, the representational mode of *Paradise Lost* becomes, apparently for the first time, the subject of public debate, waged largely in the pages of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and it is in this directly openly polemical context that we encounter what would seem to be the first comprehensive allegorical reading of the poem on record. The March 1738 issue of the *Magazine* carried an open letter signed "Theophilus", charging *Paradise Lost* with the specific religious heresies such as Arianism, and more broadly with a tendency "greatly to corrupt our Notions of the most sacred Things, and to sensualise our Ideas of God, of Heaven and another World", especially in its "ridiculous" and "foolish" account of the war in heaven, with its "Cannon and Balls, and Powder and Matches, all described in such a Manner, and with such a Train of ludicrous Circumstances, as would make one believe he intended a joke by it".<sup>205</sup> These charges had been heard before. What is novel, however, are the counter-arguments of the respondent, who adopted the pseudonym "Philo-Spec.". In his first letter, Philo-Spec. responds largely by citing from Addison's *Spectator* papers, the acknowledged authority on the subject.<sup>206</sup> More quotations from Addison follow in a further letter, answering specific points of Theophilus' criticisms, yet in answering the most serious and farthest-reaching charge – that Milton's depictions of the deity and the other worlds are almost as "sensual" as the pagans' – Philo-Spec. resorts to a now familiar, but then, as far as *Paradise Lost* is concerned, original argument. "But let us hear Milton", writes Philo-Spec., "who put these words into Raphael's Mouth":

#### What surmounts the Reach

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<sup>204</sup> To Voltaire, as to Addison, allegory should be "short, decent, and noble", which is to say, it should not be allowed to pass from diegesis into mimesis (*Essay*, 114). Milton's Sin and Death cross this invisible line, turning from figures to monsters, as do his angels, "For what avails it to draw at length the Picture of these Beings, so utterly Strangers to the Reader, that he cannot be affected any Way towards them" (118). The War in Heaven is "an imaginary Thing, which lies out of the Reach of our Nature".

<sup>205</sup> *GM* 8 (1738): 124-5.

<sup>206</sup> *GM* 8 (1738): 201-2. Prior to the reply by Philo-Spec., a letter dated 1 August 1738, signed "Urbanus Sylvan.", appeared in the 7 August issue of *The Daily Gazetteer*, challenging Theophilus to define "what he means by the *Arian Principle*, and then produce some Passages from *Paradise Lost*, to prove that *Milton* has accepted that Principle into that Poem", and thus clear himself of the suspicion of being "some concealed Popish Tool, who to deter well meaning People from reading a Poem wherein the *Idolatry* and *Superstition* of the *Heathens* and *Papists* are exposed with all possible Strength and Beauty, would brand it with the odious Mark of *Heresy*".

Of human Sense, I shall delineate so,  
By lik'ning spiritual to corporeal Forms,  
As may express them best.<sup>207</sup>

I cite the passage in the form given by Philo-Spec., with the capitalized “W” at the beginning and a full stop at the end – a manoeuvre which, as already mentioned (n. 127), would find many later advocates. It is here, however, that the quotation is perhaps first given in this truncated form, and adduced as evidence of the representational mode of the entire poem, making Philo-Spec. the earliest known reader to understand *Paradise Lost* as a comprehensively allegorical poem.<sup>208</sup>

The exchange between these anonymous readers is a major milestone in a process which – fast-forwarding now through the mid-century – reaches a critical point with Samuel Johnson, whose well-known comments on the poem are all, point by point, anticipated by the earlier critics surveyed above, but now pursued without any of their hesitancy or restraint. He follows Addison and Voltaire in censuring the personifications: these should be “suffered only to do their natural office, and retire”, whereas “to give them any real employment, or ascribe to them any material agency, is to make them allegorical no longer, and to shock the mind by ascribing effects to non-entity”.<sup>209</sup> He extends this criticism, however, to the “immaterial agents”, i.e. the angels. To Dennis, Milton’s angels only *seemed* to confound spirit and matter, but Johnson knows not seems: Milton has “unhappily perplexed his poetry with his philosophy”, producing a poem marred by a “confusion of spirit and matter”. In

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<sup>207</sup> GM 8 (1738): 288-290.

<sup>208</sup> In his response, which brought the exchange to an end, Theophilus specifically objects to the truncation of the “though what if”, which “*Milton’s* ingenious Advocate ought not to have suppress’d”, and by which Milton “immediately suggests, that there was greater Propriety” in Raphael’s narration “than his first Caution seem’d to imply; [...] And this (I say) is corrupting our Notions of spiritual Things, and sensualising our Ideas of Heaven to a Degree that may have ill Effects on Religion in general”; “Defence of Animadversions”, GM 9 (1739): 5-6. Nor does Theophilus accept Addison’s apology for the allegory of the golden compasses, and in fact turns Addison’s prescriptions against his own reading of this passage: “how wide the Difference is between these short Allegories [i.e., in scriptural passages adduced by Addison] and the Poet’s Compasses, every body must see; the Preciseness of the Description here, and the Manner of the Messiah’s *Operation*, one Foot he center’d, and the other turn’d, &c. [7.229] may indeed be *in the Spirit of Homer*, [...] but carries in it such a Narrowness of Idea as, when applied to the Almighty Architect, is utterly profane. Allegories from sensible Things, when applied to the supreme Understanding, ought to be short, and not spun out into Particulars and Circumstances, for since we are reduced to the Use of them, merely by the Imperfection of our Minds, we ought to recover our Thoughts from them as soon as possible; otherwise, we must become shocking and ridiculous”.

<sup>209</sup> S. Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, ed. R. Lonsdale (Oxford, 2006) 1: 290-1.

Johnson's reading of the poem there are only two material and thus mimetically representable sentient beings, Adam and Eve. As for the rest, Milton "saw that immateriality supplied no images, and that he could not show angels acting but by instruments of action; he therefore invested them with form and matter". In other words, Milton wrote allegorically, and of this, given the inherent difficulty of the subject, Johnson approved, objecting only to Milton's shortcomings as an allegorical poet. He should have – as, again, Dennis had only suggested in his comparison with Cowley and Tasso – "secured the consistency of his system, by keeping immateriality out of sight, and enticing the reader to drop it from his thoughts". Thus with Johnson we reach a position exactly inverse to that of Addison: it is the mimetic elements that have now become an intrusion into an otherwise allegorical poem, and rather than a work flawed *by* allegory, *Paradise Lost* has become a work *of* flawed allegory, best read by skipping the inferior portions, especially the war in heaven, "the favourite of children, and gradually neglected as knowledge is increased".

#### READ CORRECTLY WHEN NOT READ AT ALL

Clearly, what happened here is the same that happened two and a half millennia ago in ancient Greece, and has been happening in similar circumstances ever since: allegoresis came to the rescue of a privileged text which had outlived its ideological currency. What is peculiar about this case, however, is that this happens precisely over the period at which we are supposed to see allegory declining and eventually relinquishing its hold on Western culture. The sixteenth century has been said to have revolted against allegory, as has the seventeenth, as has the eighteenth, and certainly with the Romantics, if not earlier, we should have reached the shores of what turns out a surprisingly elusive, ever-receding modernity. When *Paradise Lost* was concerned, however, the Romantics took things even further than Johnson. Blake's psychomachian allegoresis in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* will strike us as more idiosyncratic than it really is if we are not aware of how closely it is paralleled by the more prosaically expressed contemporary view of Henry Boyd, asking the reader to take the fallen

angels “merely as pictures of human nature, or at least of human passions, personified with aggravated features”.<sup>210</sup> Another decade later, this has become an orthodoxy which Coleridge restates with an air of common knowledge: “The fallen angels are human passions, invested with a dramatic reality.”<sup>211</sup> Thus the allegoresis makes an immense leap forward: to Johnson, Milton’s angels were an imperfectly executed allegorical representation of *angels*; now, Milton’s angels begin to represent abstract notions such as “Desire” or “human passions”.

From this point, an untraced and meandering, yet logically straight line leads to two classics of mid-twentieth-century Milton criticism with which this survey will close, and which manifest, in different but complementary ways, the terminal development of this critical tradition: Stanley Fish’s 1967 *Surprised by Sin* and Alastair Fowler’s 1968 edition of *Paradise Lost*. Fowler’s seminal edition is of particular interest as a bridge between the criticism of the early and mid-twentieth century, when allegorical readings of Milton’s poem proliferated, but the term *allegory* itself was largely banished from critical discourse, and the term’s postmodern rehabilitation, reflected in the work of Treip, Martin, Borris, and others. The use of *allegory* in Fowler’s first edition is thus relatively sparse, and largely restricted to various sources or analogues of Milton’s poem rather than the poem itself. There is, however, a premonition of what is to come a generation later: “What still remains to be investigated”, writes Fowler in the first-edition Introduction, “is the extent to which *Paradise Lost* allegorizes the inherited epic images, in the Neoplatonic manner of a Landino or a Spenser – that is, the extent to which the poem is tertiary rather than secondary epic.”<sup>212</sup> By 1982, the problem has been solved: in Fowler’s influential *Kinds of Literature*, *Paradise Lost* is

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<sup>210</sup> “Observations on the Characters of the Fallen Angels of Milton”, in *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. J. Todd, 2nd ed. (London, 1809), 2: 259-71. Cf. the famous passage in Blake’s work: “The history of this” – the process of Desire being restrained by Reason – “is written in *Paradise Lost*, & the Governor or Reason is call’d Messiah./ And the original Archangel, or possessor of the command of the heavenly host, is call’d the Devil or Satan, and his children are call’d Sin & Death./ But in the Book of Job, Milton’s Messiah is call’d Satan./ For this history has been adopted by both parties./ It indeed appear’d to Reason as if Desire was cast out, but the Devil’s account is, that the Messiah fell, & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss. [...] But in Milton, the Father is Destiny, the Son, a Ratio of the five senses, & the Holy Ghost, Vacuum!”; W. Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, ed. G. Keynes (Oxford, 1975), plates 5-6.

<sup>211</sup> “Unassigned Lecture Notes”, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, gen. ed. K. Coburn (London, 1969-2002), 5: 2.426-7; Foakes tentatively suggests a dating range of 1808-18. Here Coleridge also notes that Milton solves the problem of representing the “supreme Being [...] by keeping the peculiar attributes of divinity less in sight, making them to a certain extent allegorical only”.

<sup>212</sup> *Paradise Lost*, ed. A. Fowler, 1st ed. (1968; repr. London, 1972), 11.

discussed in the same breath as *The Faerie Queene* – “tertiary” epics in which there is “little wholly exterior action”.<sup>213</sup> Consequently, revising the above sentence in the second edition of 1998, Fowler no longer asks whether, but “how far *PL* is tertiary rather than secondary epic – the extent, that is, to which it allegorizes the ancients, whether in the manner of Cristoforo Landino or of Edmund Spenser”, whose *Faerie Queene* is “the most important vernacular model” for the poem, “even if not apparently so”.<sup>214</sup>

Revising his classic edition thirty years after its original publication, Fowler can thus effortlessly translate the mid-twentieth-century jargon of *metaphor*, *symbol*, *myth*, and so on, into the newly fashionable jargon of *allegory*. “When Johnson said”, we read in the first edition, “that ‘the want of human interest is always felt’ in *Paradise Lost*, he betrayed his blindness to the metaphorical activity of the poem, whereby angels, devils, and even Sin and Death – not to say the divine persons – all convey insights in the psychology of man.”<sup>215</sup> In the second edition, Johnson no longer overlooks the “metaphorical activity”, but “the allegory whereby angels, devils, Sin, Death – even the divine persons – convey human insights and experiences”.<sup>216</sup> A new section, on “Politics and Allegory”, is added to the Introduction, positing “political”, “theological”, “moral”, and “psychological allegory” in the poem. The “angelic action probably all has allegorical content”, and a sufficiently “broad allegorization” can even help to integrate the problematic episode of Sin and Death.<sup>217</sup> The representation of the divine persons risks “anthropomorphism in the interests of narrative and dramatic exposition”, but this is “Allegory, not novelistic realism”.<sup>218</sup> Adam and Eve are a “recurrent allegory [...] represent[ing] complementary parts of human nature”.<sup>219</sup> Even physical settings, for instance the layers of the earth’s atmosphere, are “allegorical”: “Throughout, atmospheres allegorize degree – moral and natural station”.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> A. Fowler, *Kinds of Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 163.

<sup>214</sup> *Paradise Lost*, ed. A. Fowler, 2nd ed. (Harlow, 1998), 11.

<sup>215</sup> *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler, 1st ed., 32.

<sup>216</sup> *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler, 2nd ed., 36.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, n. to 3.80-343.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, n. to 4.411.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, n. to 12.76-8. The same is found throughout the second edition. In the first-edition Introduction we thus read that Milton’s God “is not a character, though he thinks and speaks” (35), that the description of hell is “not intended merely as physical description” (n. to 1.62-4), or that literal-minded critics miss Milton’s “moral

Where in Fowler we thus find the extreme development of the *via positiva*, in Fish we find a complementary radicalization of the *via negativa*. The reception of *Surprised by Sin* has mostly revolved around the old “Satanist” controversy and the book’s proposal of a *via media* between “pro-” and “anti-Miltonist” readings.<sup>221</sup> This, however, was only the first stage in Fish’s “program of education”, teaching his “fit reader” to see not only through Satanic grandeur and rhetoric, but also space, time, anthropomorphism, and eventually the poem altogether, enabling him or her to ascend to the utmost peak of human cognition and there “apprehend, negatively”, by a “negative intuition”, that which can never be apprehended in any other way. Fish described this as Milton’s “brilliant solution to the impossible demands” of his subject, “enabling him to avoid the falsification of anthropomorphism and the ineffectiveness of abstraction”.<sup>222</sup> Surely, however, this brilliant solution must be all too familiar to students of allegory: anthropomorphism is falsification, yet outright statement of abstract doctrine is ineffective – the solution, from the ancient Homeric allegorists onwards, is to “invest” doctrine with myth, to write allegorically.

What is novel here, however, is Fish’s solution to the increasing demands of allegorizing *Paradise Lost*, especially in the light of the discourse of “accommodation”, which came to prominence exactly at the time Fish was at work on his book, and which, at least in MacCallum’s interpretation of 1962, was deeply problematic for his thesis, and is therefore silenced at all costs.<sup>223</sup> Rather than in the investment of the immaterial with poetic

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point” (n. to 1.728-9); in the second edition, Milton’s God “is not a character at all in the novelistic sense; he is rather an allegorical *factio*” (39), “merely” has vanished, and the literalists miss “the point of M.’s discontinuous, allegorical picturing”. Romantic critics, Fowler notes in the added section on “Criticism”, “quite misconceived Milton’s allegory, in which the rigid authoritarianism is Satan’s and freedom lies in faithful obedience to God” (45). See also the revisions and additions in the annotations at 1.73-4, 1.84, 1.200-8, 2.99-101, 2.330, 2.630-2, 2.745, 2.752, 2.859-903: “allegory need not be continuously visualized”; “The first of the metamorphoses, allegorizing moral decline”; “As an allegoria, posing further questions”; “Since angels are immortal, these doubts [...] are allegorically human”; “allegorically every sin is a new rebellion”; “In ‘figurative relation to exploratory intellectual flight’”, citing Borris, “Allegory”, 108; “Allegorically, he denies his own sin”; “Allegory tells the same events in another way”; “Chaos the ‘allegorical epitome of confusion, straying, error’”, citing Treip, *Poetics*, 137. The examples are from the Introduction and Books 1-2 only, and are all retained in the revised second edition (Harlow, 2007).

<sup>221</sup> A comprehensive survey is now available in the chapter on “Satan” in Leonard’s *Labourers*.

<sup>222</sup> *Suprised by Sin*, 38.

<sup>223</sup> In a sleight of hand similar to his treatment of Raphael’s preamble to the war in heaven, Fish gives a carefully doctored version of the key passage from *De doctrina*, quoted above on pp. 248-9. He quotes only the first paragraph, omitting “For although it be granted” (i.e., “For granting that”, in the *YP* text used by Fish) and the whole final caveat, and ending with a full stop after “as we can grasp him” (i.e., “comprehension”), which,

matter, or the dramatization of the abstract in the poetically concrete, the allegorical meaning of *Paradise Lost* is now claimed to reside in the unattainability of this meaning – in the reader’s negative apprehension of what can never be apprehended positively. Where it is the purpose of other allegorical poems to speak the unspeakable, *Paradise Lost* was designed to unspeak the speakable. The poem is a manual of the kind of apophatic theology espoused by Augustine in the passage cited at the beginning of this chapter, in which even to describe God as unspeakable is to say something of Him, and therefore to end up in verbal conflict – literally, a war of words, “pugna verborum”.<sup>224</sup> When God speaks in Milton’s poem, we are wrong to *read* what he *says*. We should know better: we should know that, at most, our notion of speaking can serve as an allegory of what, in a reality beyond human comprehension, God really does – if, indeed, he *does* anything. Faced with God’s speeches, the “fit reader” will unread them, apprehending that they only “figure forth” the “still clarity and white light of divine reality”, just as Satan’s speeches “represent” the “colour and chaotic liveliness of earthly motions”.<sup>225</sup> In short, *Paradise Lost* is “read correctly” only when it is “not read at all”.<sup>226</sup>

The proposition might seem absurd, but in fact the notion of a book best read when not read at all is a remarkably exact description of the fate of any book, sacred or secular, which attains canonical status. No wonder Fish likes to cite Augustine, the man to whom we owe the best advice for writing such a book: “Certainly, to make a bold declaration from my heart, if I myself were to be writing something at this supreme level of authority I would choose to write so that my words would sound out with whatever diverse truth in these matters each reader was able to grasp”.<sup>227</sup> But what does it mean for supreme authority to be invested in words without meaning, an obedient textual mirror which merely reflects whatever truth we

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although apparently mandated by the 1960s house style of the Harvard University Press, leaves a false impression of coherence and completeness. Furthermore, Fish explicitly refuses to apply the passage, even in this form, to *Paradise Lost*: “The safest way, however, may not be sufficient to the occasion”, and scripture offers only a “partial solution” – it is “the word of God; but it is the word of God accommodated to the powers of his creatures and therefore not literal or absolute, as inspiration and grace are absolute” (ibid.)

<sup>224</sup> Augustine, *De doctrina*, 16.

<sup>225</sup> Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 88.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., xlix.

<sup>227</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* (1991; repr. Oxford, 1998), 12.31.



choose to set before it? What does it mean to read books correctly by not reading them at all? It is easy to understand the positions of Dryden, Johnson, or Coleridge, for all of whom sacred truths were at stake, and any quarrel with Milton's poem was an instalment of the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry, of which allegory is almost as ancient a means of settling. What is puzzling, however, is what continues to drive it long after its ideological fuel is supposed to have been exhausted. Why did the allegoresis of *Paradise Lost* not only persist but reach such radical heights in the supposedly secular literary academia of the late twentieth century? Why have, at the same time, aspects of Milton's work most germane to a modern secular outlook remained so long overlooked? Why, finally to address one of the fundamental issues raised by this study, has allegory not only survived modernity but come back with a vengeance? A difficult question, no doubt, and usually evaded in silence, but perhaps finally ripe for quelling disputatiously.

## **AFTERWORD**

### **(NEO)ALLEGORY AND (ANTI)MODERNITY**

“I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence”. The statement comes from the foreword to what is by all accounts the most popular work of fiction of our time, with a readership numbering in the hundreds of millions. Indeed, as mere numbers go, it is this statement, rather than that of any scholar or theorist of allegory mentioned in this study, that has to be, along with the rest of the passage in which it appears, the single most widely disseminated discussion of the subject to appear to date. To make things more interesting, its author was a devoted and distinguished medievalist, a conservative in political as well as most literary matters, and a deeply devout Roman Catholic to boot – the least likely person on earth, one would think, to harbour a cordial dislike of allegory to begin with, much less to get a chance to bring it to the attention of a wide international audience. And as if that were not enough, the book prefaced by this statement was so extraordinarily idiosyncratic as to be almost *sui generis*: a vast, three-volume, 1000-page fantastic romance, narrated in an archaic style punctuated by quotes in multiple invented languages and alphabets, buttressed with extensive prologues and appendices, embedded into an elaborate metafictional framework, accompanied by extensive chronologies and genealogies, and meticulously drawn maps. The book had in it dragons and wizards, yet it was clearly not a children’s book, for no child could make much sense of it, and if it was for adults, there had never been one like it. “Quite honestly”, said its sympathetic but sceptical publisher, “I don’t know who is expected to read it.”

The book in question is, of course, J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*.<sup>1</sup> Originally published in 1954-55, the book that nobody was expected to read soon became a bestseller, its author an international celebrity. Most readers simply enjoyed the story. Some, however, believed that there was more to it than met the eye, and as the book’s popularity soared to unprecedented heights, Tolkien increasingly found himself answering questions for

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<sup>1</sup> For the above quote, see *The Lord of the Rings*, 2nd ed. (1966; repr. London, 1995), xvii; for the comment by the publisher, S. Unwin, see *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. H. Carpenter (1981; repr. New York, 2000), 120. According to various media sources, *The Lord of the Rings* is estimated to have sold over 150 million copies, and to have been translated into almost forty languages.

which he had very little sympathy. As early as 1938, he had received a letter “asking for an authoritative exposition of the allegory” of his first book of fiction, *The Hobbit*, and with the expanded scope and decidedly adult tone of the sequel such queries proliferated. “It is not ‘about’ anything but itself”, he writes in response to an early reader’s comments in April 1955, and “Certainly [...] has *no* allegorical intentions, general, particular, or topical, moral, religious, or political.” “The Hobbits are no more an ‘allegory’”, as another letter suggested, “than are (say) the pygmies of the African forest.”

Nor is the book in any way about its author, and is “at no point an attempt to allegorize his experience of life”, an experience which extended over the two World Wars, in the first of which Tolkien saw combat at the Battle of the Somme, and which many presumed to be the topical horizon for the world-scale conflict depicted in the book. Tolkien would have none of it: “Of course my story is not an allegory of Atomic power”; “To ask if the Orcs ‘are’ Communists is to me as sensible as asking if Communists are Orcs”. By 1958, he is losing his patience: another “enquirer (among many)” into “what the L.R. was all about, and whether it was an ‘allegory’”, is answered in a rudely incomprehensible manner, and Tolkien notes that he lost no sleep over never hearing from him again. By 1961, he is furious: in the preface to the Swedish translation, the translator had taken the liberty of suggesting, among other things, that the story’s arch-villain, a demonic creature most often referred to as Sauron, represented Stalin – “He is welcome to the rubbish, but I do not see that he, as a translator, has any right to unload it here. [...] I utterly repudiate any such ‘reading’, which angers me. The situation was conceived long before the Russian revolution. Such allegory is entirely foreign to my thought.”<sup>2</sup>

By 1966, when the above-quoted Foreword was added to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, the various allegorical readings were proliferating, and increasingly making their way into journalistic and academic criticism, so Tolkien took this opportunity to issue a public disclaimer of any such intentions on his behalf. “I should like”, he writes,

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<sup>2</sup> For the above quotes, see Tolkien, *Letters*, 41, 220, 233, 239, 246, 262, 264, 307.

to say something here with reference to the many opinions or guesses that I have received or have read concerning the motives and meaning of the tale. The prime motive was the desire of a tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of the readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite them or deeply move them. As far as any inner meaning or “message”, it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical.<sup>3</sup>

Besides delighting and moving, Tolkien is also willing to grant his story a degree of “applicability”, as he terms it, to contemporary events. He is careful, however, to distinguish this from allegory: “I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think many confuse ‘applicability’ with ‘allegory’; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author”.<sup>4</sup> The distinction is clear, especially in those cases where the focus of the “application” post-dates the work. In 2003, for example, as the United States and its allies were embarking on their invasion of Iraq, a photomontage entitled “Frodo Failed” appeared on the Internet, showing US President George W. Bush with Sauron’s ring photoshopped onto his finger. It is clear how Tolkien’s story was hereby applied to a contemporary person and event, and how this can be extended indefinitely, to persons and events of which the author cannot have had the slightest conception, just as it is clear that *The Lord of the Rings* cannot be meaningfully called an allegory of any of these persons and events.

The phrase “history, true or feigned” should ring a bell: Bacon had defined poesy as “FAINED HISTORIE” in his *Advancement of Learning*, which also included an early critique of allegory. As already mentioned, Bacon’s definition of poetry was widely anthologized in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the possibility of actual influence should not be excluded. The terms *delight* and *move* also have a long tradition in poetics and rhetoric, yet here again, just as with Bacon, the classic triad is incomplete, and any notion of literature as *teaching* is conspicuously absent. More broadly, the aesthetic principles underlying Tolkien’s denunciation of allegory are clearly Romantic-modernist in affiliation, and in fact his literary

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<sup>3</sup> *Lord*, xvi.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

work is best described as the fusion of a belated and hypertrophied Romanticism and an instinctive, untheorized modernism. Its particular flavour of pseudomedievalism, deriving largely from the author's extensive engagement with the literature of the old north, is clearly the offspring, and in terms of popular impact, the culmination of the fascination with the Middle Ages common to the Romantic impulse in all European literatures. On the other hand, in its compulsion to play Adam and invent languages, its metafictionist impulse, and – as strange as it may sound now, when entire shelves of imitations are to be found in any bookstore – the sheer scale and novelty of its experiment, which remains the most comprehensive and elaborate attempt at fictional world-making on record, Tolkien's work is contemporary with the heyday of literary modernism in more than a merely chronological sense.

The point of all this is to put into perspective the idea of a return of allegory, supposed to have occurred, as already discussed in the Introduction, over the recent decades in response to the work of such thinkers as Benjamin, Gadamer, de Man, and others. It seems obvious this is almost exclusively a phenomenon of elite culture, and notably of specific domains in contemporary art and academia. Alongside it, in the popular sphere, the opposite appears to have taken place, and we seem to see a triumph of the anti-allegorical Romantic-modernist aesthetic at a mass level, with the thriving of such genres as either offer experiences out of the reach of everyday existence, or indeed any actual existence (fantasy, horror, science fiction), or are precisely focused on everyday experiences, albeit in a heightened mode (romance/erotica, crime/mystery). Easily recognizable behind this are the opposed but complementary poles of *The Lyrical Ballads*: Coleridge's pull towards the supernatural, and Wordsworth's towards the common experience and "real language of men in a state of vivid sensation", both pursued for their own sake rather than any allegorical meaning such as epic and pastoral were traditionally obliged to convey.<sup>5</sup> Combined, these genres make up for a huge percentage of the imaginative literature that Western adults buy of their own accord, actually read, and, most importantly in the present context, read without attempting to divine

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. ch. 1, n. 164.

some hidden sense concealed in such books. It thus seems that much the same thing happened here as when the London groundlings started paying for their plays in the 1570s, facilitated, no doubt, by various other developments falling under the category of modernity, such as the spread of verbal and eventually also mathematical and scientific literacy, which is itself related to still further social developments.<sup>6</sup>

If, then, any return of allegory occurred in the past several decades, it occurred in the sphere of elite rather than popular culture. Indeed it has always been so. Allegory does not come naturally. To begin with, the notion that a poem or a story contains an additional layer of meaning, significantly different or unrelated altogether to what it more obviously relates, is a phenomenon that emerges only with an advanced level of literacy. This is what one would expect theoretically, going by the scholarship on the orality-literacy dynamic, and what would also seem to be the case empirically.<sup>7</sup> “Where and when the impulse to read poems allegorically emerged is”, Dirk Obbink writes recently, “impossible to say”.<sup>8</sup> There is no need for such scepticism. Without any wish to underestimate the enormous problems involved in tackling these questions, there are, at the very least, highly promising avenues awaiting further exploration. For one thing, more important than the question of where or when is that of *why* allegory emerges, and here the answer seems only too clear: it emerges in order to adapt a canonical work to the ever-changing cultural circumstances in which it finds itself embedded. If this is so, then the questions of where and when are far from unanswerable. In fact, a large part of the answer is right there in the question itself, and as Obbink himself goes

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<sup>6</sup> Literacy, as J. H. Miller reminds us in *On Literature* (London, 2002), “is associated with the gradual appearance from the seventeenth century onward of Western-style democracies. This means regimes with expanded suffrage, government by legislatures, regulated judicial systems, and fundamental human rights or civil liberties. Such democracies slowly developed more or less universal education. They also allowed citizens more or less free access to printed materials and to the means of printing new ones” (3).

<sup>7</sup> For introductions into this scholarship, see W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (1982; repr. London, 1988), and E. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write* (New Haven, 1986). There seems to be no idea of allegorical interpretation in oral cultures. Two studies have used the term *allegory* in relation to products of what their authors designate as oral cultures – M. Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness* (Bloomington, 1982), and R. Cancel, *Allegorical Speculation in an Oral Society* (Berkeley, 1989) – yet in both cases the term is used in vague senses virtually indistinguishable from metaphor, or even less tangible impressions of an imaginative resonance between two elements in a certain narrative. In both cases, too, we are dealing with products of something close to what Ong calls “secondary orality” (*Orality*, 11): narratives which, while oral, are told by people who are either literate or are at least familiar with literacy, and have been exposed to concepts and practices, and the effects of practices, associated with literacy.

<sup>8</sup> D. Obbink, “Early Greek Allegory”, in *Companion*, ed. Copeland and Struck, 15.

on to say, “among the Greeks evidence for reading allegorically [...] is as old as any evidence we have for reading poetry”.<sup>9</sup> This gives us at least a notional lower limit for the emergence of allegoresis – namely, once there comes into existence such a thing as a poem one reads rather than listens to.

Before this happens, poems and stories, existing only in the fleeting act of their oral performance, can be brought up to date with any significant change in social circumstances simply by altering their contents. There is no permanent record of a “true” version of such a poem or story, and its contents are governed by what has been described as the “homeostatic” tendency of oral tradition: the tendency to “live very much in a present which keeps itself in equilibrium or homeostasis by sloughing off memories which no longer have present relevance”.<sup>10</sup> This works on the level of lexis, on the level of non-narrative discourses such as genealogies, and also on the level of narrative agents and motifs in stories and myths; when they grow out of date, they are simply changed.<sup>11</sup> A question orality-literacy theorists do not seem to have posed, and on which theorists of allegory have also had very little to say, is what happens once a poem or story is fixed in writing, from which point direct intervention into its contents becomes increasingly untenable, and yet social pressures continue to exert their influence.<sup>12</sup> This is exactly what must have happened in ancient Greece between the seventh century BC, when the Homeric epics were first written down, and the sixth, when the first allegorical readings of these epics appear. At least as far as the Western tradition is concerned,

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<sup>9</sup> “Allegory”, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ong, *Orality*, 66-7.

<sup>11</sup> There are thus well-documented cases where an oral people genuinely believe in the age-long identity of their myths, yet irrefutable evidence – a comparison of a transcript or recording produced by outsiders at a certain point in time to a recent performance of what is presented as the same poem or story – shows considerable changes occurring already in the space of several decades. The success of oral cultures at verbatim repetition of their poems and stories is “Most often [...] minimal by modern standards”, and even singers, as we have known since the ground-breaking work of M. Parry and A. Lord, typically perform not from memory, but by improvisation guided by metre and conventional formulae, a technique leaving abundant space for the revision of old and insertion of new elements; see A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* [1960], 2nd ed., ed. S. Mitchell and G. Nagy (Cambridge, Mass., 2000). “In all cases”, Ong emphasizes, “verbatim or not, oral memorization is subject to variation from direct social pressures. Narrators narrate what audiences call for or will tolerate” (*Orality*, 66-7).

<sup>12</sup> For a notable exception here, see Teskey, *Allegory*: “it may certainly be doubted whether the notion of an ‘undermeaning’ (*hyponoia*) concealed below the surface of a text could have developed out of anything in the epics themselves. Song has no surface. We may indeed deny that the Homeric Prayers constitute genuine allegory if we suppose that genuineness in this matter cannot be decided by means of a narrow, rhetorical definition. Rhetoric itself, understood as the minute, technical analysis of figures of speech, belongs to a much later age and is the expression of an instrumental relation to language” (41-2).



this is where, when, and why allegoresis emerges. The fixation of a canonical poem in writing transfers the mode of its ideological maintenance from composition to interpretation, and the increasing stability of the text, as a more in-depth inquiry would undoubtedly show, elicits ever more detailed and comprehensive efforts at its allegoresis.<sup>13</sup>

Even within an advanced literate culture, however, allegorical reading is learned behaviour. When asked what a certain story is about, a child who has yet to write his or her first book report, as well as an adult without a basic literary education, will typically respond with a plot summary. That there are such things as “themes” or “symbols” – the preferred contemporary terms for hermeneutic activity that is often undeniably allegorical in nature – is something most of us first hear from a teacher. Again, these are especially important in works less readily transmutable into the common currency of “human interest”, as is the case with the contemporary “fantasy” genre at the Coleridgian pole, but also with its Wordsworthian counterpart. In the same year *The Lord of the Rings* was published, Ernest Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature “for his mastery of the art of narrative, most recently demonstrated in *The Old Man and the Sea*, and for the influence that he has exerted on contemporary style”. The Nobel Prize is awarded for an author’s entire oeuvre, but the 1954 materials particularly stressed Hemingway’s then-recent bestseller – a novella about an old Cuban fisherman named Santiago, who struggles to catch a giant marlin only to have it eaten

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<sup>13</sup> Theoretically, it should be possible to see developments in the mode of allegoresis paralleling each stage in the progress of a text’s canonization: the first written versions; the point where disparate written versions are replaced by a broadly standard one (the moment which, with respect to the Homeric epics, would be equivalent to that of the “Pisistratean redaction”, although the traditional account is now dismissed); the more detailed stabilization of the standard text through the advent of textual criticism, etc. Corresponding to these, there should appear an increasing amount of detail in the proposed allegorical readings: in the earliest stages, we should expect to find simple equations between a major narrative agent and an abstract concept; later on, as the narrative becomes more standardized, we should find attention to the interaction of narrative agents and particular aspects of this interaction (i.e., not only Athena = Wisdom, but Athena-pulling-Achilles-by-the-hair = wisdom-restraining-passion); later still, when not only the narrative, but the text itself becomes more minutely standardized, attention will be given not only to narrative but to individual words, including their etymology. Other developments also need to be considered in this respect, including the move from scroll to book, and eventually from manuscript to print, or the emergence of such paratextual elements as marginal notes, lists of contents, indices, and so forth. On the importance of the switch from scroll to codex in the Christian tradition, see, e.g., F. Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 89: “The transfer of the Hebrew scriptures to Greek codices enacts the appropriation of those writings for Christian purposes. It made possible the use of the Jewish account for the peculiar purpose of establishing the validity of the Christian version not by, or not only by, reference to the Law and the Prophets, but also by reference to the testimonies, scattered apparently at random in the ancient text, and having occult senses that only now emerged. [...] So the codex, originally perhaps the memorandum-book of Hellenistic businessmen, became the vehicle for a new kind of a narrative, reflecting new views on the divine and human arrangement of time.”

by sharks while bringing it back to the shore – which has since acquired the status of a modern classic, and retains a very strong curricular presence. There could hardly be two books more different than *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, yet they perfectly exemplify the complementary impulses in modern aesthetics for epic and pastoral, shorn of their previous connection to allegory, which Hemingway dismissed with respect to his story as decisively, if not as politely, as Tolkien. “There isn’t any symbolism” [sic], he writes to Bernard Berenson in September 1952: “The sea is the sea. The old man is an old man. The boy is a boy and the fish is a fish. The shark are all sharks no better and no worse. All the symbolism that people say is shit.”<sup>14</sup>

The difference between the cultural status of Tolkien and Hemingway speaks eloquently of the prudence of keeping such comments to one’s private correspondence, and perhaps an interview or two, rather than placing them on prominent and permanent public display.<sup>15</sup> At any rate, *The Old Man and the Sea* owes its canonical status precisely to such “symbolic” or “thematic” interpretations, habitually imposed on the work ever since the Nobel Prize documents. The above-quoted summary praises Hemingway’s “mastery of the art of narrative” and “influence [...] on contemporary style”, yet the presentation speech by the Swedish author and critic Anders Österling tells a more complex story.<sup>16</sup> Österling stresses the rise to prominence of American literature, Hemingway’s journalistic roots and his eventful biography, and the flourishing of his style in the form of “the laconic, drastically pruned short story”, which attains, in *The Old Man and the Sea*, the sustained power of a “masterpiece”. Yet the novella is not merely an “unforgettable story of an old Cuban’s fisherman’s duel with a huge swordfish in the Atlantic” – “Within the frame of a sporting tale, a moving perspective of man’s destiny is opened up; the story is a tribute to the fighting spirit, which does not give

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<sup>14</sup> E. Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, ed. C. Baker (1981; repr. New York, 2003), 780.

<sup>15</sup> Hemingway’s public statements elsewhere are more temperate. In an interview for *Time* magazine, 13 December 1954, he says: “No good book has ever been written that has in it symbols arrived at beforehand and stuck in [...]. I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things” (72). Cf. Tolkien, *Letters*, 121: “one finds, [...] that the better and more consistent an allegory is the more easily can it be read ‘just as a story’; and the better and more closely woven a story is the more easily can those so minded find allegory in it. But the two start out from opposite ends.”

<sup>16</sup> See “Summary” and “Presentation Speech” at [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1954](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1954).

in even if the material gain is nil, a tribute to the moral victory in the midst of defeat.” “Courage”, we are told, “is Hemingway’s central theme – the bearing of one who is put to the test and who steels himself to meet the cold cruelty of existence, without, by so doing, repudiating the great and generous moments.” Apparently at this point the author felt he was close to crossing a line, for he takes a moment to specify that “Hemingway is not one of those authors who write to illustrate theses and principles of one kind or another”. This is followed by further praise of the ascetic yet evocative style, but Österling returns to his preferred hunting grounds, venturing a predictable comparison with Melville’s *Moby-Dick* – not, again, that either author “wanted to create an allegory; the salt ocean depths with all their monsters are sufficiently rewarding as a poetic element. But with different means, those of romanticism and realism, they both attain the same – a man’s capacity of endurance and, if need be, of at least daring the impossible”.

From Österling’s speech a direct line leads to the novella’s treatment in those most reliable indicators of the hermeneutic underpinnings of contemporary literary academia: *CliffsNotes*, *SparkNotes*, *GradeSaver*, and their like. What, according to these lowest hermeneutical denominators, is *The Old Man and the Sea* about? The two options we find in the *SparkNotes* digest of the novella, in the section entitled “Themes, Motifs, and Symbols”, are “The Honor in Struggle, Defeat & Death”, and “Pride as the Source of Greatness & Determination”.<sup>17</sup> “Themes”, a general heading informs us, “are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.” They come in a variety of shapes and sizes. While *SparkNotes* favour specificity (and ampersands), *GradeSaver*’s themes, like Österling’s “courage”, are mostly undiluted Platonic ideas, arriving in single-word instalments: Hemingway’s story is about “Unity”, “Heroism”, “Manhood”, “Pride”, “Success”, and “Santiago as Christ”.<sup>18</sup> The equivalent section in the earliest of such “study guides”, *CliffsNotes*, opens with the claim that it is “A commonplace among literary authorities [...] that a work of truly great literature invites reading on multiple levels”, adding further that this

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<sup>17</sup> From *SparkNotes*’ “literature study guide” to the work, anonymous; [www.sparknotes.com/lit/oldman/themes.html](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/oldman/themes.html).

<sup>18</sup> “*The Old Man and the Sea* Themes”, from *GradeSaver*’s online “study guide” to the work, by S. Elizondo; [www.gradesaver.com/the-old-man-and-the-sea/study-guide/themes](http://www.gradesaver.com/the-old-man-and-the-sea/study-guide/themes).

particular work “also clearly fits into the category of *allegory* – a story with a surface meaning and one or more under-the-surface meanings; a narrative form so ancient and natural to the human mind as to be universal”.<sup>19</sup>

Nothing could be further from the truth, and ironically, there is no better proof of this than the very existence of *CliffsNotes* and similar publications and services. Surely the great majority of the hundreds of millions of pupils and students who resort to these have perfectly normal human minds. What they lack is the particular intellectual skill of transmuting the particulars of a literary work into more universal categories, of transforming Santiago, an old Cuban fisherman, into Man or Christ. This, perhaps obviously, is not the same as abstraction – as extrapolating, from any number of particular fishermen, the concept *fisherman* – but entails the attaching to a certain particular of a *different* universal. “The young can’t distinguish”, as Plato was well aware, “what is allegorical from what isn’t”,<sup>20</sup> but that does not mean they are not capable of abstraction, or of “application” – of deriving an analogy from a story they have read, of applying it to their own circumstances. What their teachers require, however, is something very different, and the process that comes naturally, reading a story and then observing how it parallels or diverges from one’s own experience, is inverted. The view of “themes” as “universal ideas” that are “explored” in a literary work obviously presumes that these ideas predate this work, and are intentionally encoded in it. The secondary meaning, students are to understand, *precedes* the story, and they are to *recover* it. Whatever we may think of this, the fact is that those who, overwhelmed by this task, turn to such aides as *CliffsNotes* do so precisely because this activity does not come naturally to them, in spite of having, in the great majority of instances, perfectly normal cognitive capacities. Were they not made to look for “themes” and “symbols” by their teachers, they would never, under normal circumstances, arrive independently at such notions. The inability to summarize a plot, to contemplate an abstract concept, or to recognize a symbolic relation where one is either explicitly indicated, or may be inferred from the immediate context – these would all be

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<sup>19</sup> “Themes in *The Old Man and the Sea*”, from *CliffsNotes*’ “literature notes” on the work, by J. Salladé Criswell; [www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/o/the-old-man-and-the-sea/critical-essays/themes-in-the-old-man-and-the-sea](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/o/the-old-man-and-the-sea/critical-essays/themes-in-the-old-man-and-the-sea)

<sup>20</sup> *Republic*, 378d.

recognized as severe cognitive impairments. To be unable to allegorize is to lack a particular intellectual skill, of which we may think what we will, but which is certainly not ancient – not in any broad anthropological perspective – let alone universal.

## II

Thus allegory is learned, which means that it is taught, which means that it becomes, at a certain level of professionalization, a commodity, which means that it acquires social and class dimensions. It was in fact a lucrative business long before *CliffsNotes*. While agnostic on the subject in his *Republic*, Plato wants to restrict the circulation of at least the more problematic myths to the wealthy elite: they “should be passed over in silence, not told to foolish young people. And if, for some reason” – such as their allegorical significance? – they have “to be told, only a very few people – pledged to secrecy and after sacrificing not just a pig but something great and scarce – should hear it, so that their number is kept as small as possible”.<sup>21</sup> More explicitly, we read in Xenophon’s *Symposium*, a Socratic dialogue from about the same period, of Niceratus, a young Athenian who boasts of knowing the Homeric poems by heart, yet his interlocutors are not impressed:

“But have you failed to observe,” questioned Antisthenes, “that the rhapsodes, too, all know these poems?”

“How could I,” he replied, “when I listen to their recitations nearly every day?”

“Well, do you know of any tribe of men,” went on the other, “more stupid than the rhapsodes?”

“No, indeed,” answered Niceratus; “not I, I am sure.”

“No,” said Socrates; “and the reason is clear: they do not know the inner meaning [*huponoias*] of the poems. But you have paid a good deal of money to

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<sup>21</sup> *Republic*, 378a.

Stesimbrotus, Anaximander, and many other Homeric critics, so that nothing of their valuable teaching can have escaped your knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

The masses are welcome to Homer's "thoughts" (*dianoiai*), the merchandise of Plato's Ion, but his "under-thoughts" (*huponoiai*) are reserved for the elite.<sup>23</sup>

The ethical and political implications of this are obviously not very pleasant. Indeed, already in what could be the very first recorded appearance of the word *allegory* – in the treatise *On Style* attributed to an unidentified and perhaps otherwise unknown Demetrius, and variously dated between the third century BC and the second century AD – the mode of discourse denoted by this term is exemplified by its use in war propaganda:

There is a kind of impressiveness also in allegorical language [*allegoria*]. This is particularly true of such menaces as that of Dionysius: "their cicadas shall chirp from the ground."

If Dionysius had expressed his meaning directly, saying that he would ravage the Locrian land, he would have shown at once more irritation and less dignity. In the phrase actually used the speaker has shrouded his words, as it were, in allegory. Any darkly-hinting expression is more terror-striking, and its import is variously conjectured by different hearers. On the other hand, things that are clear and plain are apt to be despised, just like men when stripped of their garments.

Hence the Mysteries are revealed in an allegorical form in order to inspire such shuddering and awe as are associated with darkness and night. Allegory also is not unlike darkness and night.<sup>24</sup>

Almost as if recoiling from the implications of what he had just written, Demetrius now repeats Aristotle's strictures against "riddling" language in the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, but the

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<sup>22</sup> Xenophon, *Symposium*, 3.6, in *Memorabilia* (1923; repr. Cambridge, Mass., 1997).

<sup>23</sup> "In the classical period", Ford comments, "allegorical readings of epic could be offered as an intellectual commodity under the term *huponoia*. If a rhapsode expounded the 'fine thoughts' (*kalai dianoiai*) of Homer, an education in poetry could still be incomplete without an acquaintance with the 'under-meanings' (*huponoiai*) available from a different class of experts", which provided "those with pretensions to cultural leadership an elite purchase on a kind of poetry that was increasingly becoming the possession of all Greece", and "did for those wishing to be distinguished in the city what the *recherché* interpretations of Orphic texts or Pythagorean secret sayings (*sumbola*) did for those desiring to form their own communities at the city's margins, uniting them and their common beliefs by a shared interpretation of cherished texts" (*Origins*, 73).

<sup>24</sup> *Demetrius on Style*, ed. W. R. Roberts (Cambridge, 1902), par. 99-101.

damage has been done. While not entirely overthrown, the exoteric ideal of Aristotelian rhetoric and poetics has been eclipsed by shrouds, darkness, shuddering and awe. Where Aristotle believed “that language to be good must be clear, as is proved by the fact that speech which fails to convey a plain meaning will fail to do just what speech has to do”,<sup>25</sup> Demetrius, along with the rest of the allegorical tradition, believes that there is room in the world for a type of language which is not clear, and is not to be universally intelligible to all, but separates its audience into two camps, those who are privy to its hidden sense, and those who are not.

Perhaps the finest exploration of this aspect of the subject remains that in Frank Kermode’s *Genesis of Secrecy*. Apparently nobody has commented on a subtle prank pulled by Kermode at the beginning of this book, where the first thing one encounters after turning the title page is a dedication reading:

To Those Outside

ἐκείνοις δὲ τοῖς ἔξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὰ πάντα γίνεται

The dedication is given in exactly this form, in full consciousness of the fact that the lack of a translation and any sort of reference will make it incomprehensible to the Greekless reader, because it is meant not merely to announce, but to *perform*, the book’s central thesis, namely, that “the history of interpretations may be thought of as a history of exclusions” – exclusions of those portions of the interpreted texts which contradict a proposed interpretation, which is Kermode’s principal point in the quoted passage, but also, as the larger tenor of his discussion entails, exclusions of hermeneutic outsiders; a separation between those to whom “has been given the secret of the kingdom of God”, and “those outside”, to whom “everything is in parables; so that [*hina*] they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest [*mēpote*] they should turn again, and be forgiven.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Rhetoric*, 1404b1.

<sup>26</sup> See Kermode, *Genesis*, 20; I quote the Revised Standard Version here, as this is what Kermode uses. Incidentally, we encounter something very similar on the title page of Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, featuring the often quoted couplet from Ovid’s *Amores* – “Vilia miretur vulgus: mihi flauus Apollo/ Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua” – which is not only about such a division of the readership into initiates and outsiders, but which, in its untranslated Latin, enacts this division. The couplet is quoted as it appears on the title page of W. Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis* (London, 1953). For a translation, see Ovid, *Amores*, 1.15.35-6, in

At the heart of the book is an encounter with “the great crux” of the Parable of the Sower, its aftermath, including the above-quoted words of Christ to his apostles as they appear in the Gospel of Mark, 4:11-23, and the disturbing ethical implications of the hermeneutics they advocate.<sup>27</sup> In what could be the oldest of the four gospels, Christ speaks to the people in parables in order for them *not* to understand him, and consequently *not* be saved. The sower sows some seeds along the path, some in rocky places, some among thorns, and some on good soil; all fail but the last, which “brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and hundredfold” (4:8). “He who has ears to hear”, concludes the parable, “let him hear.” The apostles, however, fail to understand the meaning, and in response to their request for clarification, Christ utters the statement quoted above, according to which parables serve to prevent outsiders from reaching the truth, and are consciously used by him to doom them to damnation. This, as he further explains, is the meaning of the Parable of the Sower, or rather, the Parable of Parables: the seed is the word, and the word is wasted on those unprepared to receive it, whereas with those who are prepared it bears fruit hundredfold. This is a general hermeneutic principle, and the parable is really about itself, about the protocols of its own interpretation: “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?”

Unsurprisingly, as Kermode notes, “the true sense of this theory of parable interpretation is much disputed”, and “cunning ways are found of making it mean other than it seems to say, involving accusations of treachery in redactors and scribes, and even in the Greek language as Mark used it”.<sup>28</sup> Thus already in Matthew (presuming the priority of Mark) the key words in Mark’s account – *hina*, “so that”, and *mēpote*, “lest... again” – are excised, and the rest carefully manipulated into a statement supporting a very different and comfortingly exoteric theory of parable: “This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand./ With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says: ‘You shall indeed hear but never

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*Heroides* (Cambridge, Mass., 1914): “Let what is cheap excite the marvel of the crowd; for me may golden Apollo minister full cups from the Castalian fount”.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 3.



understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive””, etc.<sup>29</sup> Lurking behind this, however, is the chilling account in Mark, presenting us with a rare unvarnished look at the ethical and ideological implications of hermeneutic esotericism in its crudest, exemplary form:

Only the insiders can have access to the true sense of these stories. “For to him who has will more be given; and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” To divine the true, the latent sense, you need to be of the elect, of the institution. Outsiders must content themselves with the manifest, and pay a supreme penalty for doing so. Only those who already know the mysteries – what the stories really mean – can discover what the stories really mean.<sup>30</sup>

### III

“Allegories”, goes Benjamin’s much quoted analogy, “are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.”<sup>31</sup> Whatever precisely that might mean, they are also what apartheid is in the realm of politics, and what the bourgeoisie is in the realm of class struggle. Behind many of the statements of the modern hostility towards allegory, even when these are expressed entirely or predominantly in aesthetic and intellectual terms, unease with the ethical and political aspects of the phenomenon may also be detected. The prospect of a

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<sup>29</sup> See Matt. 13:13-16. Kermode elaborates: “Now it happens that Mark’s first interpreter was Matthew (I assume throughout that Mark has priority and is Matthew’s principal source, though this long-established position is now under challenge). And Matthew also seems to have found Mark’s *hina* intolerable. For though he does not omit the general theory of parable from his big parable chapter (13), he substitutes for *hina* the word *hoti*, ‘because.’ This is a substantial change, involving a different grammar; Matthew replaces Mark’s subjunctive with an indicative. Later he had to deal with Mark’s *mēpote*, ‘lest they should turn,’ which obviously supports the uncompromising mood of *hina*; here he went to work in a different way. The whole passage about hearing and seeing comes from Isaiah (6: 9-10), though Mark, in paraphrasing it, does not say so. What Matthew does is to quote Isaiah directly and with acknowledgment, so that the lines retain a trace of their original tone of slightly disgusted irony at the failure of the people to perceive and understand. The sense is now something like: As Isaiah remarked, their stupidity is extremely tiresome; this seems the best way to get through to them. The *mēpote* clause is thus bracketed off from the rest; instead of Mark’s uncompromising exclusions – outsiders must stay outside and be damned – Matthew proposes something much milder: ‘I speak to them in parables *because* they see without perceiving...’ He was, it appears, unhappy with the gloomy ferocity of Mark’s Jesus, who is also, at this place, very hard on the Twelve: ‘if you don’t understand this you won’t understand anything.’ Matthew leaves this out, and substitutes a benediction: ‘Blessed are your eyes, for they see...’” (30-1).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Origin*, 178.

return of allegory is thus fraught with all kinds of questions and tensions, even beyond the principal spheres of aesthetics and literary criticism. What is to be made of this? If we are indeed witnessing a return of allegory, should we welcome it? What if, even more disconcertingly, allegory never really left, but has been with us all along, taking such temporary aliases as *symbol*, *irony*, or *theme*? From one perspective it might indeed appear as if we have not made it very far at all from the mystery cults. Granted, students of literature are no longer required to slaughter animals larger than a pig in order to be admitted to the inner cultural sanctum, but Xenophon's Niceratus could certainly appreciate how steep their fees can get. And does not the classic threefold distinction of the audience found throughout the allegorical tradition survive quite intact in contemporary culture? – those without or with only an elementary literary education take stories literally; those with a secondary literary education have learned to scour them for “themes” and “symbols”; finally, those whose undertake university degrees in the subject are admitted to an elite interpretive caste, capable of unearthing “human interest” and “present significance” even out of the most unlikely and uncooperative of texts.

But most importantly, has a return of allegory really occurred? The word has certainly made a comeback, and retains a currency in contemporary culture that would have been unimaginable half a century ago. Now, however, that the initial wave of enthusiasm has subsided, it seems quite clear that the “allegory” of Benjamin, de Man, and others who followed in their train is not really the return of an old concept but the rechristening of a new concept by an old name, and furthermore, as already noted above, that the statements of this new concept of “allegory” are premised on the very aesthetics that they implicitly or explicitly set out to challenge.<sup>32</sup> This emerges over and over again in Benjamin's *Origin*: “It is not possible”, we read, “to conceive of a starker opposite [than allegory] to the artistic symbol, the plastic symbol, the image of organic totality”, yet in spite of this there is still a “synthesis reached in allegorical writing as a result of the conflict between theological and artistic intentions, a synthesis not so much in the sense of a peace as a *treuga dei* between the

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. ch. 3, pp. 267-8.

conflicting opinions”.<sup>33</sup> This is also why Benjamin so conspicuously avoids a formal definition of allegory: we get suggestive analogies and metaphors, and we hear a lot about what allegory supposedly does, but not about what it is, since a definition would inevitably expose the fact that, in the final analysis, Benjamin’s concept of allegory has little independent, positive content. It is, quite simply, a denial of the symbol, and completely incomprehensible except as this denial. “Where man is drawn towards the symbol, allegory emerges from the depths of being to intercept the intention, and to triumph over it.”<sup>34</sup> An exact inversion of this claim would perhaps be the most adequate summary of Benjamin’s meandering argument in the *Origin*: he is drawn towards allegory, yet the symbol emerges from the depths of his modern aesthetic being to intercept his intention, and triumph over it.

The aesthetic fascination Benjamin finds in works of baroque allegory, and his vague expressions of an experience of an allegorical “synthesis” in these works, is inconceivable, indeed barely comprehensible, without being understood as the inverted form of the organic unity of the Romantic symbol. Until Benjamin, allegory is invariably, both by its advocates and its opponents, construed in terms of levels, and in terms of a hierarchy of levels: the literal is not merely separate from the allegorical, it is also less important than it, and often explicitly devalued by it. Neither Benjamin, however, nor any of the more recent critics who have championed a return to allegory, want to return to the traditional, schematic understanding of the mode, and in this they confirm their deep and irreversible contamination with modern, post-Romantic aesthetics. Admittedly, even in the crudest, most schematically allegorical work imaginable there is always going to be a degree of cognitive overlap between the mimetic and the allegorical, some of the more nuanced cognitive blending involved with what we call metaphor and symbol – and of course a wholly satisfactory distinction between metaphor, symbol, and allegory is one of the standing desiderata in allegory studies, and one far too extensive to be adequately addressed here. Yet to treat, as many critics now do, the metaphorical or symbolic blending as the desired effect rather than accidental side-effect of allegorical writing, to read allegory as if it were metaphor or symbol, is simply to abolish any

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<sup>33</sup> *Origin*, 176-7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

meaningful distinction between these terms. Thoroughly consonant with this conclusion is Benjamin's conception of the history of allegory, which is plainly the old Burckhardtian framework in new garb. Just as Burckhardt's, Benjamin's allegory is thus the product of Christianity, and "it is not possible to overestimate the importance for the baroque of the knowledge of the Christian origin of the allegorical outlook".<sup>35</sup> More specifically, *bad* allegory is Christian, and is characteristic of the Middle Ages, while *good* allegory is classical: "Mediaeval allegory is Christian and didactic", whereas "the mystic and natural-historical aspect [of] the baroque is descended from antiquity: Egyptian antiquity, but subsequently Greek antiquity as well".<sup>36</sup> The allegory-symbol opposition is replaced with one "between the modern allegory which arose in the sixteenth century and that of the middle ages", yet the fundamental historical framework and the values embedded in it remain unchanged.<sup>37</sup>

It further stands to reason that the most radical reinterpretations of "allegory" will occur in precisely those cases where it forms part – as it does with Benjamin and de Man, and less explicitly, for example, Foucault – of a critique of the post-Romantic notion of the symbol, and more broadly, a critique of modernity. This is so because these critics are attempting to pull themselves out of their modern condition by their own hair – because, as Habermas diagnosed with such admirable precision in his classic response, they

essentially appropriate the fundamental experience of aesthetic modernity, namely the revelation of a decentred subjectivity liberated from all constraints of cognition and purposive action, from all the imperatives of labour and use value, and with this they break out of the modern world altogether. They establish an implacable opposition to modernism precisely through a modernist attitude. They locate the spontaneous forces

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 220. This is repeated in equally explicit terms in the ensuing pages: "It may well be that the ground of antiquity was prepared for the reception of this mode of thought by these religious improvisations" – i.e., the proliferation of minor deities, which, although hovering on the brink of personification, still do not represent "the truly allegorical way of looking at things" – "but allegory itself was sown by Christianity" (223-4); "The three most important impulses in the origin of western allegory are non-antique, anti-antique: the gods project into the alien world, they become evil, and they become creatures" (225); "The allegorical outlook has its origins in the conflict between the guilt-laden physis, held up as an example by Christianity and a purer *natura deorum* [...], embodied in the pantheon" (226), etc.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

of imagination and self-experience, of affective life in general, in what is most distant and archaic, and in Manichaean fashion oppose instrumental reason with a principle accessible solely to evocation, whether this is the will to power or sovereignty, Being itself or the Dionysian power for the poetic. In France this tradition leads from Georges Bataille through Foucault to Derrida. Over all these figures hovers, of course, the spirit of Nietzsche, newly resurrected in the 1970s.<sup>38</sup>

Only from such a position can Foucault write that the poet's is "the *allegorical* role", and yet define this allegorical role in terms which clearly derive from the mute, transcendent resonance of the post-Romantic symbol: "beneath the language of signs and beneath the interplay of their precisely delineated distinctions, [the poet] strains to catch that 'other language', the language, without words or discourse, of resemblance".<sup>39</sup> Similarly to Benjamin's, Foucault's argument entails not only a conceptual but also a historical reversal. The difference is that Benjamin is in this respect a Burckhardtian, drawing the line at the close of the Middle Ages, whereas Foucault draws it at the close of the Renaissance, or rather, the dawning of the Enlightenment. Thus, in a textbook antimodernist manoeuvre, aesthetic modernity is evacuated from the historical period in which it came into being, projected onto that which preceded it, and rechristened to bear the name of the very doctrine it was devised to combat.

We find a similar case even with the most explicitly anti-symbolist of the modern revisions of "allegory", that of Paul de Man. Following Benjamin and Gadamer, de Man argues that the notion of the symbol, in its post-Romantic usage, "had in fact been substituted for that of 'allegory' in an act of ontological bad faith":

Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in a void of this

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<sup>38</sup> "Modernity", in *Discourse*, ed. Passerin d'Entrèves and Benhabib, 53. Cf. ch 2, pp. 146-8. Beyond the usual suspects, my understanding of the antimodernist tendencies in Western thought is greatly indebted to the late Z. Kravar, one of my lecturers at the University of Zagreb, and his book *Antimodernizam* (Zagreb, 2004).

<sup>39</sup> *Order*, 55.

temporal difference. In so doing, it prevents the self from an illusory identification with the non-self, which is now fully, though painfully, recognized as a non-self.<sup>40</sup> Yet again we find, however, the polemic against the aesthetic of the symbol undercut by the fact that “allegory” is redefined in terms which plainly derive from this very aesthetic. For example, even as he quotes from the famous passage in Coleridge’s *Statesman’s Manual*, de Man conspicuously fails to cite the portion most obviously relevant to his and any other discussion of the idea of “temporality” in figurative language, where Coleridge reaches for the notion of temporality precisely in his attempt to define the concept of symbol in opposition to allegory. “Allegory”, writes Coleridge, “is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language” – a formulation implying a non-narrative (“picture-language”) stasis – whereas

a Symbol [...] is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative.<sup>41</sup>

It is thus precisely the temporality of the symbol that differentiates it, “Above all”, from allegory; both entail a relationship between the universal and the particular, and both aim at a unity, yet it is in the symbol that this takes place “through and in the Temporal”.

Why does de Man choose to ignore this, and instead proclaim temporality as the defining feature of “allegory”? Predictably, this is where his language, as with Benjamin and Foucault above, gets particularly dense: the symbol, we are told, “will never be allowed to exist in serenity; since it is a veil thrown over a light one no longer wishes to perceive, it will never be able to gain an entirely good poetic conscience”.<sup>42</sup> More comprehensibly, perhaps, we encounter a resistance to the notion of a unified self: “the asserted superiority of the symbol over allegory” is a form of “self-mystification”, “a defensive strategy that tries to hide from [a] negative self-knowledge”, knowledge of “the self in its authentically temporal

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<sup>40</sup> “Rhetoric”, in *Blindness*, 207, 211.

<sup>41</sup> S. T. Coleridge, *The Statesman’s Manual* (London, 1816), 36-7.

<sup>42</sup> “Rhetoric”, in *Blindness*, 208.

predicament”.<sup>43</sup> Be that as it may – those who have waded through the biographical sewers have their own angle on this, but it is beside our purpose here – it is clear that the notion of “allegory” espoused in “Rhetoric of Temporality” is not in any sense a return to the traditional understanding of this notion. Much less so is the more deconstructive inflection of “allegory” of de Man’s *Allegories of Reading*, the book that spawned a flood of similar, “allegories-of-X” titles, in spite of its highly specific usage of the term, denoting the self-deconstructive impulse inherent in literary works, the tendency of the “literary text [to] simultaneously assert and den[y] the authority of its own rhetorical mode”, enabling us to read it as “the allegorical narrative of its own deconstruction”.<sup>44</sup>

There are thus two ways of looking at the supposed return of allegory, and its bearing on the allegory-modernity problem. From one perspective, it seems clear that the return is really no return at all, that the various concepts of “allegory” emerging from this impulse are radically novel rather than traditional, and moreover, that they are anti- rather than post-modern, in the Habermasian sense of reproducing, in their deep intellectual structures, certain fundamental tenets of the very aesthetic modernity that they notionally seek to challenge. On the other hand, the fact is that it is this term, *allegory*, rather than any other, that has emerged as the label under which these developments have unfolded, and this is clearly a phenomenon of first-rate significance for allegory studies. It is also a phenomenon that needs to be put in perspective by assessing its impact, or lack thereof, beyond the sphere of elite culture, and which awaits further detailed attention from scholars of the subject.

As does the allegory-modernity problem more broadly. If biblical allegoresis – one of Christianity’s many paradoxical inheritances, via intermediaries like Philo of Alexandria, from its pagan adversaries – played an essential role in the formation of the civilization of the so-called Middle Ages, the revolt against biblical allegoresis was no less crucial to the doctrines of the Protestant Reformation, and consequently to events which once again rewrote the cultural and political map of Europe. And yet, it has recently been argued that this same Protestant literalism also paved the way for the emergence of modern science, which in turn

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> *Allegories*, 72.

expedited the process of secularization, leading to further and even more fundamental socio-political transformations.<sup>45</sup> Nor is this the final reversal, as contemporary resurgences of exegetical literalism tend to turn precisely on this modern world that their past dispensations had unwittingly ushered into being, whereas allegory, formerly an impediment to modernity, now emerges as one of its major bulwarks. One case in point is the literal reading of biblical cosmogony on which some strands of Abrahamic creationism base their denial of modern geological, astronomical, and evolutionary science, in contrast to the doctrines of mainstream Abrahamic denominations, which tend to view this cosmogony as allegorical, and are therefore capable of reconciling it with the findings of scientific inquiry, with far-reaching cultural and political ramifications. It is sufficient to contemplate the prospect of, say, the Roman Catholic Church, with its estimated 1.2 billion believers, revoking its current official doctrine on the hexameral creation – which, according to its catechism, is to be understood “symbolically”<sup>46</sup> – to understand the magnitude of the implications of such seemingly abstruse and inconsequential matters. Competing attitudes towards the complex of phenomena denoted by the term *allegory* have in fact shaped history to a far greater extent than is usually acknowledged, and they continue to shape it, especially where interpretations of canonical texts still directly underscore cultural debate and political conflict. To take another obvious example, the turbulent and ongoing history of Middle-Eastern conflict is not fully comprehensible without at least some understanding of the bitterly contested hermeneutical apparatus that has accumulated around such key scriptural concepts as “jihad” or “the promised land”. In such contexts, the decision whether we are to read literally or allegorically remains a matter of utmost intellectual and political urgency, and indeed of life and death. The continuing relevance of these concepts and their transformations, and hence the continuing need for studying them, cannot be overemphasized.

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<sup>45</sup> See Harrison, *Bible*. For a precursor to Harrison’s argument, see R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (1972; repr. Edinburgh, 1984).

<sup>46</sup> See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 337: “Scripture presents the work of the Creator symbolically”, “symbolice” in the Latin version; I quote from the online text at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).



#### IV

In the Afterword to the 2012 reprint of his seminal study, Angus Fletcher recalls being asked by an early mentor, “Why are you writing about the kind of symbolism that you clearly do not like?”<sup>47</sup> First of all, such a question simply cannot occur in most of the natural and social sciences, and even in many departments in the humanities. Surely entomologists dislike being bitten by mosquitoes no less than the rest of us. On the other hand, there perhaps exist, although one hopes they do not, such historians of the plague who like the plague, or, say, sociologists of violence against sexual minorities who like violence against sexual minorities. In fact, much of the most pressing research by our colleagues in various areas of the natural, social, and human sciences is on things we all deeply dislike: things like disease, climate change, or the very rich, which we desperately want to know more about because they threaten our health and well-being, or even the very survival of our race. This notion, then, of studying a subject one likes is not just some quaint mannerism that one has to suffer through in professional small talk (“So what do you work on?” – “Allegory” – “Allegory? How interesting! I have to say, though, I never really liked Spenser...”). Nor is it restricted to outbursts of an essentially political hostility, as when Harold Bloom – speaking, of course, not only for himself but for many of his less vocal peers – sought to brand literary scholars who openly expressed ideological disagreement with the texts they worked on, and indeed took to working on these texts precisely in order to express this disagreement, as a “school of resentment” (the problem being not in the fact that they treated their texts as little more than pretexts for political debate, but that they took a critical rather than affirmative position in this debate).<sup>48</sup>

The question of why one studies a subject one does not like – the possibility of this question, which seems to remain as strong in contemporary literary studies as when the question was posed to Fletcher over half a century ago – is a more serious affair. It is, moreover, especially serious when posed with respect to allegory, for allegory is itself one of

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<sup>47</sup> *Allegory*, 371-2.

<sup>48</sup> *Canon*, 4 *et passim*.

the primary means by which canonical texts have been made “likeable” to elite Western audiences since Theagenes of Rhegium. Lurking beneath the question of why one studies allegory if one does not like it is thus the more fundamental question of whether we can imagine a different kind of academic literary studies than this floundering assemblage of Arnoldian atavisms that we somehow seem to be unable to overcome. Once upon a time, such a thing was imaginable, and the most radical experiments in poetry went hand in hand with the most radical attempts to date at a genuine science of imaginative literature. Even as he befriended and admired the Russian avant-garde poets, with whom, along with their peers throughout the West, poetic experiment reaches its utmost frontiers, Shklovsky founded a Society for the Study of Poetic Language, designed to place literary studies on a firm scientific footing. Around the same time, Roman Jakobson founded a kindred society in Moscow, the Moscow Linguistic Circle, before emigrating to Czechoslovakia, and eventually the United States. “Until recently”, he wrote, soon after arriving to Prague in 1920,

the history of art, particularly that of literature, has had more in common with causerie than with scholarship. It obeyed all the laws of causerie, skipping blithely from topic to topic, from lyrical effusions on the elegance of forms to anecdotes from the artist’s life, from psychological truisms to questions concerning philosophical significance and social environment. It is a gratifying and easy task to chat about life and times using literary work as a basis, just as it is more gratifying and easier to copy from a plaster cast than to draw a living body.<sup>49</sup>

“Until recently” – how disheartening to read this from the present perspective, when it is abundantly clear that Jakobson’s youthful optimism has proven gravely unfounded, and when every single item on his list is far more likely to be taken for a virtue rather than a vice. Roughly contemporary with this, and equally melancholy, is the unbridled confidence of the American Shakespearean E. E. Stoll:

Ours is the day of the historical method [...]. Other poets, as Homer and Dante, have yielded to it; the Bible, even the Koran is yielding to it now: fetichism [*sic*] is all that

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<sup>49</sup> R. Jakobson, “On Realism in Art” [1921], in *Language in Literature*, ed. K. Pomorska and S. Rudy (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 19.

stands in the way. That Shakespeare – *fétiche monstrueux*, as M. Sarcey calls him – is still bedecked with the rags and tinsel of the cult is due largely to the fact that scholars have kept to the life of the playwright and the language and external history of the plays, and have left criticism, the conclusion of the whole matter, to poets, essayists, gentlemen of taste and leisure, not to mention a horde of the tasteless and leisureless – propagandists and blatherskites.<sup>50</sup>

This is where we stood *c.* 1915. Where we stand today, in 2015, with the hydra of “presentism” upon us, and with our returns to allegory, Burckhardt, humanism, character criticism, seems all too obvious.

To return to the question posed to Fletcher – “Why are you writing about the kind of symbolism that you clearly do not like?” – it should be easy to see how perfectly it epitomises the tradition at which “historicists” like Stoll and “formalists” like Jakobson charged so quixotically, and in which the allegorical conception of literature plays an essential part. It is only to be expected that this tradition will knit its hoary eyebrows over this rarest of wonders under the academic sun: a literary scholar who, if you can believe it, *dislikes* his object of study. “At the time”, Fletcher continues, “I had no ready answer, but eventually it became clear to me that beyond a vague personal interest my neutral stance regarding aesthetic value was akin to the scientist’s neutrality, a value-free interest in the forms and especially the rhythms of a certain natural order, whatever that turned out to be.”<sup>51</sup> That is, of course, the obvious and indeed the only legitimate answer to be had – provided it is understood that there is, historically speaking, nothing neutral or value-free about such notions as “the scientist’s neutrality” or “value-free interest”. On the contrary, the impulse to study allegory, indeed the very ability to recognize it as a distinct object of historical and theoretical knowledge, is the product of the same historically specific developments to which we owe the emergence of modern anti-allegorical aesthetics.

Thus the question is to be turned on its head. It is only because of our dislike for allegory that we are able to study this subject in the first place. Only once an alternative

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<sup>50</sup> “Anachronism”, 557.

<sup>51</sup> *Allegory*, 372.

aesthetics becomes possible does allegory emerge into view as something to be studied rather than practiced, rather than something that simply is. This is why we have two millennia of extensive and extraordinarily variegated practice of allegory in the West, yet not a single study of the subject from this entire vast period. Much of this history remains uncharted, and many problems await further discussion. The loudly trumpeted return of allegory is one of the challenges here, but a far greater one is its silent, capillary survival at all stages and levels of literary culture, from the first book report to the doctoral dissertation, and from the peer-reviewed article in a distinguished journal to the tangled underwood of *CliffsNotes* and *GradeSaver*. At every step, the fundamental prerequisite to recognizing that there is a subject to begin with, and to identifying and appraising its various manifestations, is the possibility of an alternative conception of poetry, poetic theory, and the modalities of their institutionalization, whether in the academia or elsewhere. Allegory remains a controversial subject in contemporary literary studies because the very idea of studying this subject is not, in the final analysis, entirely compatible with some of the fundamental elements in the current configuration of the discipline. Yet from Aristotle onwards, knowledge about imaginative literature – genuine, lastingly relevant knowledge in the spheres of poetics and literary history, informed by, but transcending, successive tides of literary and critical fashion – has come into being largely in those instances where, and in so far as, imaginative literature ceased to be understood as itself a form of knowledge.

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